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MODERN THEATRES AND CINEMAS

The Architecture of Pleasure

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MODERN THEATRES AND CINEMAS

P. MORTON SHAND

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P. M. S.

September, 1930.

Postscript. I have also to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Frank A. Tugwell for permission to include the views of his fine reconstruction of the Savoy Theatre, London.

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THE CAPITOL CINEMA, Breslau. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.* Night architecture *par excellence.*

DEDICATED
TO
OSKAR KAUFMANN
In Admiration and in Gratitude for
the Liveliest of his
Creations

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Fig. 1 : A stop-press illustration of the NEW VICTORIA CINEMA, now being erected in London for one of the largest English combines. This excellent, if somewhat Germanic façade emerges as a symbol of hope for the future from a hoarding decorated with a particularly haphazard and emetic display of posters.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF PLEASURE

I

MODERN PLEASURE

THE demand for pleasure, the press and the pulpit are continually assuring us, grows ever more insistent in ratio to the increasing strenuousness, complexity and neurasthenia of modern life. And just as our conception of pleasure has radically changed since the war, so also have the structural forms and decorative motifs of the buildings dedicated to, or embodying, it. Essentials have suffered this permutation as well as details. Nothing—least of all pleasure—is quite what it was before. We want our amusements near to hand, on tap as it were ; and we prefer them to be invested with a minimum of social formality. Our mental insularity is passing as an inevitable result of aviation and broadcasting, and the cinema is internationalising habits as well as clothes. We are already partially continentalised. Puritan traditions have weakened, for England is beginning to return to the main stream of European life and thought from which the Reformation, the original cause of our "splendid isolation," cast us adrift. It is no longer impossible to be a typical Briton and yet a good European. Sabbatarianism is as dead as Queen Victoria, the deadest of all sovereigns. A certain *abandon* is possessing us ; and the element of duty in our distractions and relaxations, other than sport, has largely disappeared. We no longer take our pleasures quite so seriously or decorously, for we have discovered that life itself is an art, and that neglect of it sours and impoverishes us.

We want to be amused and not instructed, intrigued but not edified. The pedagogue was never more unpopular. Culture must wear her laurels not only lightly, but jauntily. To command respect she has to prove herself a good, even a racy, *raconteuse*. Academicism is as much taboo as are taboos themselves. Pomposity of any kind is a welcome Aunt Sally's coconut for us to shy at. Uplift quickly gets the uplifting posterior kick it invites. No one is considered too young to be denied his say, but many are deemed already too old to be worth listening to. The very tolerance of the age is intolerant in that it excepts from its immense indulgence all that the last century thought, wrought or represented. It has broken clean away from "all that," and refuses the least continuity with what it regards as a bogus phase of civilisation, which, if it did not afford such an admirable pillory for modern gibes, would still be near enough in point of time to nauseate the

memory. Such, then, is the Modern spirit. All these prevalent symptoms of energetic unrest, pioneering fearlessness, and a measureless disgust with the immediate past it has so violently revolted from find their echoes in Modernist architecture. So also do the keen interest and adventurous delight in the processes of technique from which this generation has torn away the fig-leaf of false shame. But in what the Germans term *Vergnügungsbauten*, and we have called "The Architecture of Pleasure," they voice their most spontaneous and complete expression.

In matters of taste there were four things which, in the opinion of the present age, the last most consistently failed to be: sincere, sober, elegant and flippant. By the force of reaction these are the very qualities that Modernist architects and decorators are most consciously striving to achieve. A chaste and forthright severity of form, combined with what a newspaper with its nose to the wind has called "tasteful levity," typify their work. Enlivenment as a compensating factor to elimination characterises the new refinement.

The architects of the preceding era were cultivated and (since the one thing then implied the other) academic gentlemen. Their sensitive and erudite fingers shrank from the vulgar improvisation of original design. Their duty was to conform, not to create. Any new departure in constructional design was heresy to their art, a blasphemy against the outward forms of civilisation. Caged squirrels, they revolved round the treadmill of "the glories of the past." Like classical French dramatists they were primarily concerned with preserving sacrosanct unities—the unities of the classic orders. The theatre being a classic word, and perpetuating a classic form of art, must inevitably assume a classic form. From Palladio's theatre at Vicenza to His Majesty's in the Haymarket there is neither development nor progress in anything except the most superficial senses of these words. Attempt to escape from the vicious circle of tradition there is none. Now the classic orders, though they have been constrained into providing the most incredibly complicated and hypocritical nun's-veilings for the indecent nudity of steel girders, do not lend themselves to the expression of modern pleasure. They are too augustly dignified, too epic and remotely antique for our mechanical age. Those threadbare "trophies"—the mouthing masks of tragedy, comedy, and history (Wilms uses them in the proscenium of his Berlin *Luna Film-Palast* (Fig. 2), but in an essentially modern mannerism), the buskins, the lyres and the beribboned musical instruments of a less remote historical period—which were such a pious convention of theatre and concert hall "embellishment" in the nineteenth century, to-day wear as fly-blown and artificial an air as terraced overmantels and ball-fringes. True, architects like Zollinger and Nachtlicht have used the arsenal of the jazz orchestra as the decorative motifs for cafés and cabarets, but they have done so with a conscious flippancy of stylisation.

The tendency to make the scenes of our lives, activities and pleasures gay and cheerful is happily a growing one. We think less of splendour and more of light, air and colour. Dignity, indeed, has changed her guise. The dignity of human life as a whole is more to us than that which is only part of the environing pomp and circumstance of a few privileged individuals. The buildings which cater for our pleasures must be comfortable and amusing to sit in, and have nothing that is

Fig. 2 : The proscenium opening, LUNA FILMPALAST, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.* The tympanum displays essentially contemporary renderings of familiar classical motives.

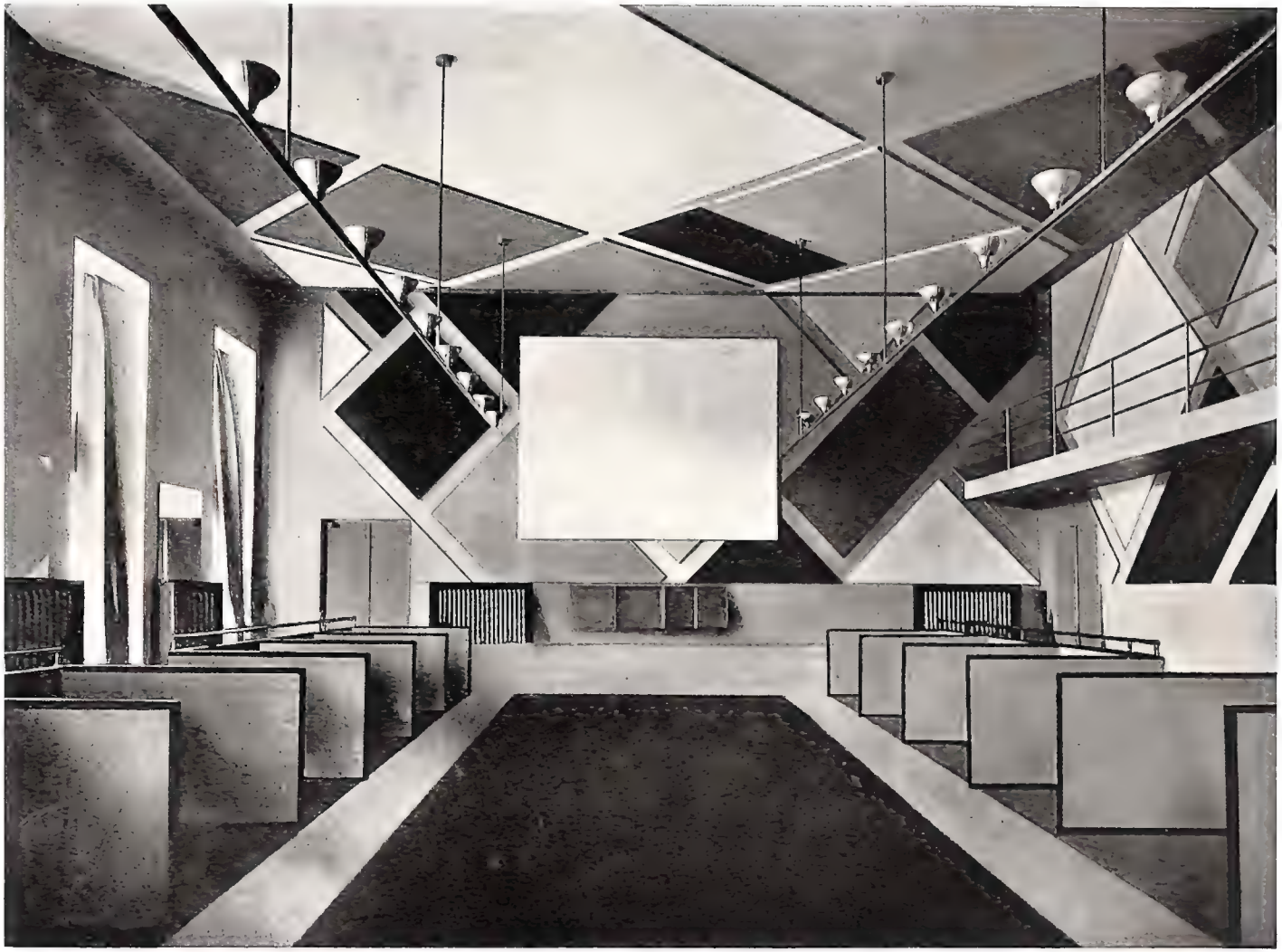


Fig. 3 : An ultra-modern effect which has possibly overreached its mark. The CINÉMA DE L'AUBETTE, Strasburg. *Théo van Doesburg, architect.*

Fig. 4: A typically English cinema interior of dubious modernity; rather conventional and colourless, but good of its kind. The CARLTON, Hull. *Messrs. Blackmore and Sykes, architects.*

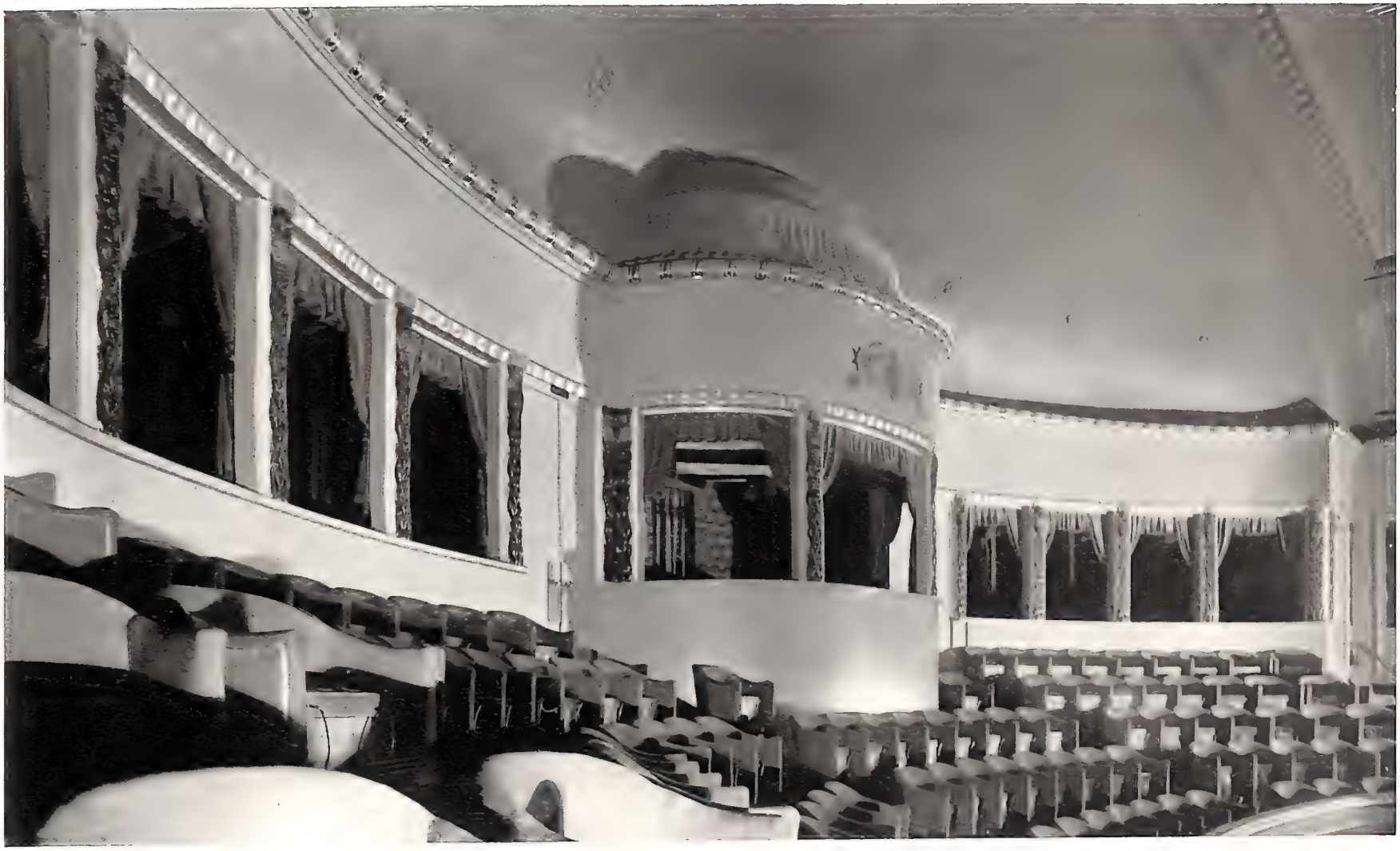


Fig. 5 : The pavilion-like central box lends interest to the otherwise practically plain apse of the back wall. The CINES, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*

" solemn serious " about them. However sparing the use of decoration may be, such as there is—and we do not ask for much—must be directly or indirectly enlivening. We no longer consent to see plays in theatres that look like *morgues* or warehouses. That the *Vieux Colombier,* in which till recently some of the best plays and films in Paris were to be seen, is no better than a ramshackle and highly combustible old barn is more an example of typically French, but very unmodern, avarice than an exception to the rule. It is true that the protagonists of " the neutral box " maintain that the structure and proportions of a room alone decorate it without the need of any adventitious ornament ; but their purism is already relaxing. For all his disciplinarian Swiss Puritanism, Le Corbusier honestly believes that in his mass-production villas and flats people will lead gayer and happier lives than was ever possible before. On the whole it is safe to say that the best results have been obtained when the exterior of the building was kept as plain, neutral and functionally sincere as possible, while into the few details chosen for enrichment a wealth of carefully edited design has been condensed. If there is one type of building in which traditionalism—that is to say the classic orders and classic decorative motifs—is more out of place than another, it is the cinema. The cinema, like a young and happy nation, has no history. It has not had time to produce pedants. Its traditions are still in that embryonic state of flux when it is almost impossible to foresee which elements will crystallise first.

The period of architecture most fertile in decorative conceits and whimsies of design was that known as the Baroque : a style the late Geoffrey Scott defined as " strength at play." Well, strength at play is precisely the mood, the humour, of the Architecture of Pleasure as the spirit of our age envisages it. It is, indeed, from that early, but still germinating, phase of Modernism we vaguely call neo-Baroque that the decorative fantasy and invention (in so far as it is not purely geometric) of Modernism is chiefly derived. No one could call a great master of neo-Baroque like Oskar Kaufmann a Modernist in the sense that Eric Mendelsohn is one. Yet his genius, for all that it often expresses itself in motifs derived from traditional sources, both occidental and oriental, nearly everyone would agree, is of an essentially modern order. There is a positively sensational divorce between the pre- and post-war work of this former pupil of Messel, the pioneer of Modernist verticality. It is as if the war had set free Kaufmann's fantasy, as though he were reborn in the spiritual experience of it, to find himself at its close no longer an architect tentatively seeking his path, but a rare master of design wholly sure of himself. It is somehow impossible to believe that without the war Kaufmann would have developed into the great artist which the last decade has revealed him as.

This collection of photographs illustrates only one aspect of the Architecture of Pleasure in its modern dress : edifices that cater for our optical and aural pleasures. The present volume is devoted to typical examples of theatres and cinemas which, it is considered, have certain valid claims to be regarded as architecture in the more timeless sense of that word, besides being structural embodiments of the modern spirit. Later, it is hoped to publish a companion volume dealing with Modernist cafés, bars, restaurants, cabarets, dancing halls, casinos, kursaals, etc. ; and subsequently another, illustrative of recent buildings incidental to the relaxations of sport and travel.

II

THE MODERN THEATRE

EVER since Max Reinhardt startled the world with "The Miracle," theatrical producers have been seeking for new technical and dramatic devices for enhancing the spectator's sense of personal participation in the action of the play. Up to that epoch-making production, pre-occupation with purely decorative and scenic considerations had resulted in the primary function of the theatre being increasingly lost sight of. The drama was half strangled by a theatricality from which the existing form of the theatre provided no means of escape. Even a theatre as beautiful and perennially young as the *Théâtre des Champs Elysées* has a form of stage (or rather stages) which differs in no essential respects from that of the *Comédie Française*. Now the cardinal defect of the stereotyped horseshoe shape of auditorium, with its frame-like stage is that, by augmenting the sense of unreality at every entrance and exit of the actors, it so largely precludes the possibility of this sustained participation. Could these drawbacks be overcome, the drama might be sensibly revitalised, because the force of its illusion would no longer suffer from intermittent lapses of "theatrical" interruption.

Poelzig's reconstruction of the *Grosses Schauspielhaus* in Berlin (Fig. 6) for Reinhardt was the first real attempt to modify the theatre structurally with these ends in view. Its design, like that of the Brothers Perret's wooden theatre in the Paris *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* of 1925, was admittedly influenced by the *Werkbundtheater* which Van de Velde, that notable pioneer of Modernism, had built for the Cologne Exhibition of 1914. Walter Gropius, who reconstructed the municipal theatre at Jena on the most denuded Modernist lines (Fig. 7), believes that the theatre-architect must build with light as much as with concrete cantilevering. For him, the theatre is simply a "space machine" of a particular kind with a technical equipment appropriate to its specific function: the creation of illusion. Its architecture, therefore, must be neutral, impersonal and devoid of all decorative treatment in order that it can offer successive producers the maximum of variability for staging their own individual effects. In other words he would give the producer's imagination and fantasy full scope in an entirely unencumbered space enclosed within blank walls—the use of a dramatic picture-gallery, not a theatrical picture-frame. The traditional stage aperture, like the rectangular film screen, he condemns as a fatal legacy from the artificial conventions of *les coulisses*. Films, whether stationary or moving in operation, obviously provide the most adaptable and efficient form of stage scenery. By making the film project not on to a small opening in an arbitrary dividing-wall facing rows of spectators, but in a continuous dado round the uninterrupted circuit of an elliptical building, illusion could be enormously heightened. The spectator being wholly surrounded by the scenic atmosphere of the drama, its action would no longer periodically escape him behind the wings.

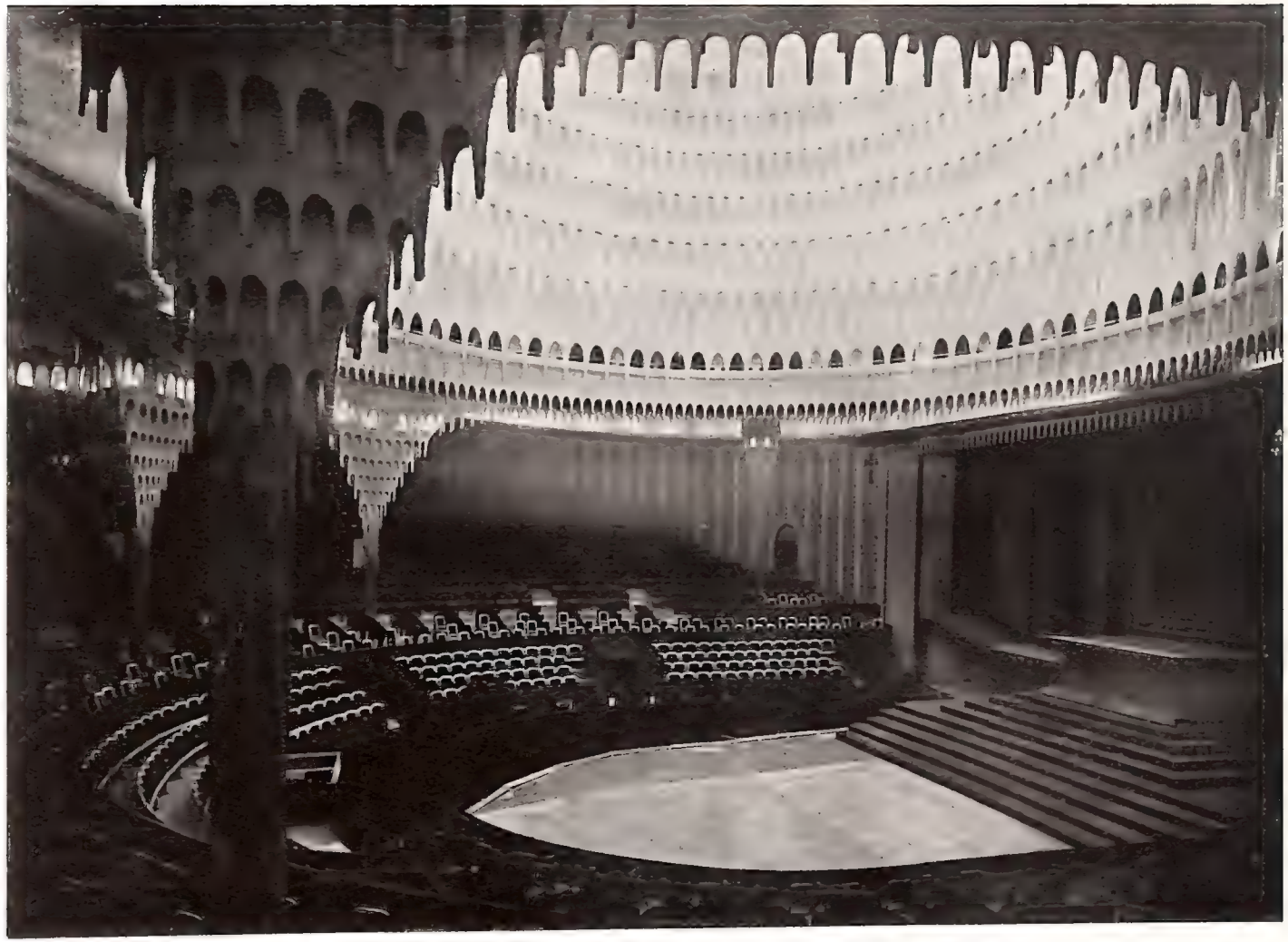


Fig. 6 : The famous concrete stalactites of this prototype of the modern theatre combine important acoustic functions with an essentially modern decorative effect. The GROSSES SCHAUSPIELHAUS, Berlin. *Hans Poelzig, architect.*

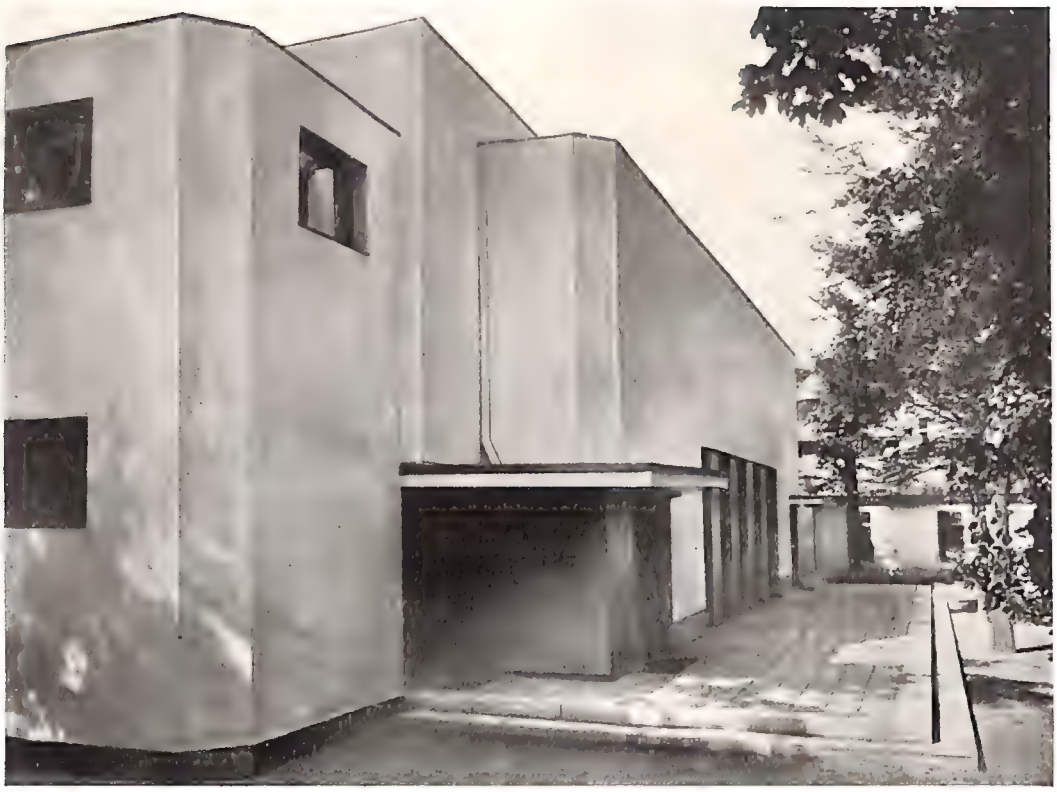


Fig. 7 : The " true-word " of Modernist Puritanism. THE STADTTHEATER, Jena. *Walter Gropius, architect.*

Fig. 8 : Flood-lighting over-emphasises the rather barbaric sculptural motif of this otherwise well-composed façade. THE ZIEGFELD THEATRE, New York. *Joseph Urban and Thomas W. Lamb, architects.*

These, at all events, are the ideas which have inspired Gropius in the design of his "complete," or "variable," theatre. The illustrations reproduced (Figs. 9 and 10)—the lower of which might, at first sight, seem to depict some complicated new kind of mechanical top—are of a scale working-model of this *Totaltheater*, designed to meet the very exacting, and apparently almost impossible, requirements of Herr Erwin Piscator, the well-known Communist theatrical producer of Berlin. Under a single roof it combines all three forms of the theatre : the circus, with its central arena entirely surrounded by spectators ; the amphitheatre with its convex, crescent-shaped and equally curtainless proscenium ; and the totally enclosed modern horseshoe theatre, which has reduced the drama to a stereoscopic projection against an artificial background, with its sunken stage completely cut off from the overhanging tiers of the auditorium by the mystery of the drop-curtain and the no-man's-land support-trench concealing the orchestra.

In the *Totaltheater*, transformation from any one to any other type of stage can be rapidly and noiselessly effected ; or, alternatively, all three types can be employed simultaneously. By sinking the first few rows of stalls, an ordinary theatre becomes an amphitheatre ; while by lowering the entire central floor space, and then making the four segments of its tiers of seats revolve through angles varying from 90 to 270 degrees, the amphitheatre can be transformed into the ellipse of a circus with an ease that would have enchanted Euclid. Actors either emerge from stairs below the stage or descend by others introduced above it. The shell of the auditorium is oval in shape, the roof being supported on twelve slender columns. Delicately synchronised projectors mounted on the rear face of these columns flood a continuous cinematographic frieze on to the elliptical wallage. This device is intended to enhance the effect of certain dramatic situations. An act on board ship can be made more realistic by a circumambient girdle of heaving waves ; a battle, or riot, scene intensified by the concentric onrush of attacking battalions or the centrifugal flight of a panic-stricken mob. Meanwhile, overhead, lowering storm-clouds, forked by lightning, float across the plastered roof, the Milky Way hovers serenely in the evening heavens, a sunset waxes and wanes, or the sky is rent by the flashes and explosions of gun-fire. These contributions of the "cloud-machine" to the resources of illusion are "atmospherics" of a legitimate kind which have a definite dramatic value as what motor-engineers would call "super-chargers." Though the present position of the theatre seems to be that its technical perfections are, as the melancholy fiasco of the *Théâtre Pigalle's* opening season has shown, now considerably in advance of any serious call which modern dramatists have hitherto made on them, it is sincerely to be hoped that financial conditions will soon enable this triple-phase *Totaltheater* to be built.

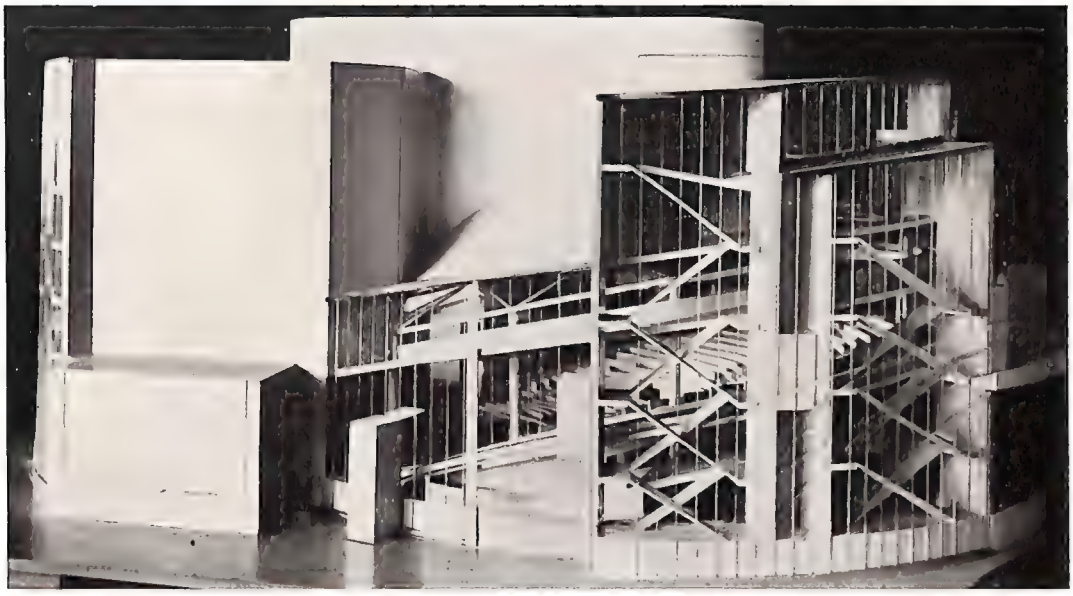
As the newest and most ambitious building of its kind, the *Théâtre Pigalle* represents a synthesis of all the most modern principles of theatre construction. It had the unusual advantage of being built regardless of cost by an enthusiastic and enlighted amateur of the drama, the Baron Henri de Rothschild. Before any of the plans were worked out, a careful comparative study of all the most recent theatres in Europe and America was made, both continents being ransacked for the very latest technical appliances. The *Théâtre Pigalle* (Fig. 11) is constructed entirely of reinforced concrete. The claims of conventional "daylight architecture"

have been ignored in the façade, which is left uncompromisingly bald. As "night architecture," however, its effectiveness could scarcely have been enhanced, having regard to the narrowness and steepness of the street in which it is situated.

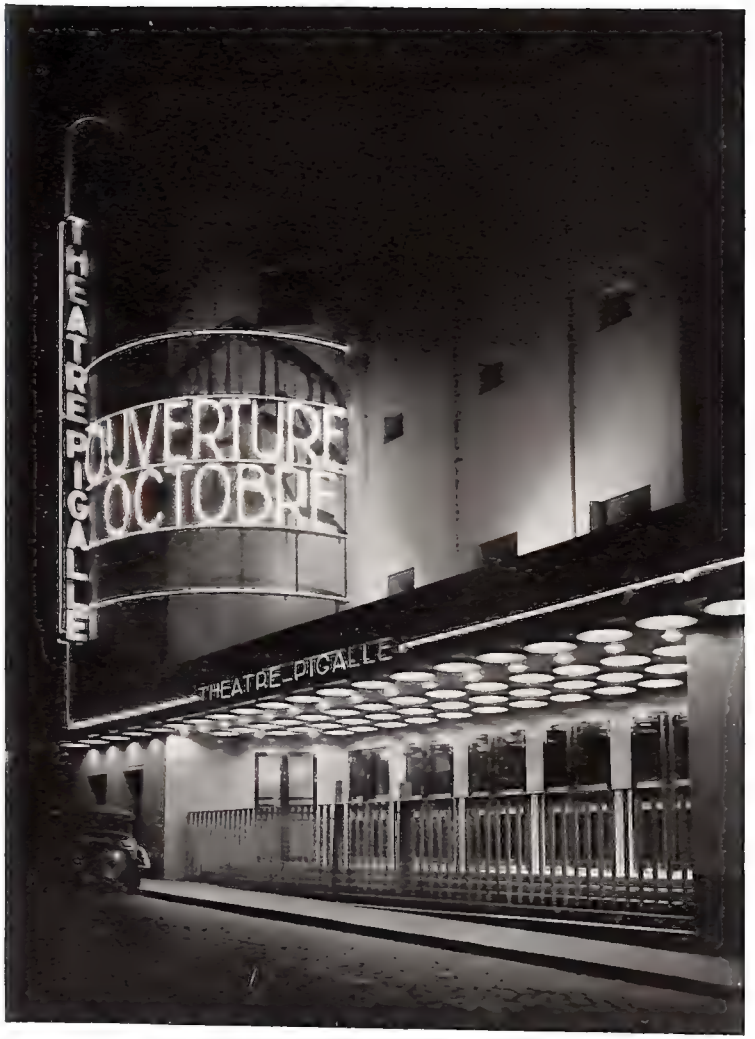
"The façade of a theatre," says Monsieur Charles Siclis, its architect, "is only a curtain-wall, the function of which is to serve as a background for a blazon of luminous letters informing the public what piece is being played, and by whom interpreted. This display of exterior lighting also provides the requisite dramatic atmosphere, for light is a primordial element in the theatre. The playgoer succumbs to the power and quality of this evocative brilliance from the moment he steps under the entrance marquise" (*see* Fig. 12). In the hall stands a monumental grillage of scintillating nickel tubes illuminated with a rainbow iridescence by powerful polychrome projectors (Fig. 13). This startling infilling, which is nearly forty feet high, is intended still further to provoke the spectator's dramatic expectancy by acting as a sort of preliminary stage curtain. Glinting metal fittings prolong the perspective of a semi-circular promenade. Decoration, properly (or perhaps we should now begin to say, improperly) so-called is reduced to a minimum. In its stead certain "psychological transition points" have been devised. In other words, the interior is conceived in terms of pure architecture—the proportion of masses in voids and solids, light and shade, which Ruskin, the omniscient moralist, pronounced "mere doggerel"—rather than of that adventitious veneering and decking out of exposed surfaces which the force of example has accustomed us to consider the only proper and legitimate architectural significance of decoration.

The ventilation system of the *Théâtre Pigalle* is of the latest American type, every cubic foot of air being automatically renewed eight times an hour. After being pumped in and filtered, the air is warmed in winter and cooled in summer so as to maintain an even temperature of 15 to 16 degrees Centigrade throughout the year, like the German cinemas which advertise that they are "Im Winter heiss; im Sommer Eis" among their other attractions. The measures taken to make the building fireproof are equally complete. All woodwork has been rendered incombustible. There are 350 automatic fire-alarms and innumerable bracket fire-extinguishers. The electric sub-station in the basement is equipped with special apparatus which permits of the maximum variations in the speed of scene-shifting. Some idea of the completeness of the electric-lighting installation may be obtained by mentioning that it entailed a million metres of wire. The main switchboard panel controls 228 switches. The illumination of the foyers, auditorium, etc. (Fig. 80, 81), is in three colours, the tints of which can be changed at will, or their intensity modified by semi-automatic "dimmers." The stage lighting—which can be either direct or indirect—is claimed to be the most complete that has been realised anywhere so far. No less than 210,000 watts intensity can be focused on the curtain. A special apparatus reproduces every hue in the spectrum, and ingeniously filters them so as to ensure harmony of colouring effects. Another, of a semi-cinematographic nature, known as the Schwalbe machine, produces cloud effects, starlight, moonshine, rain and snowstorms. Horizon lighting is provided by the Cyclorama. Stage sets and backgrounds can be lit in perfectly different colourings.

The proscenium opening, which has considerable depth, is designed on the

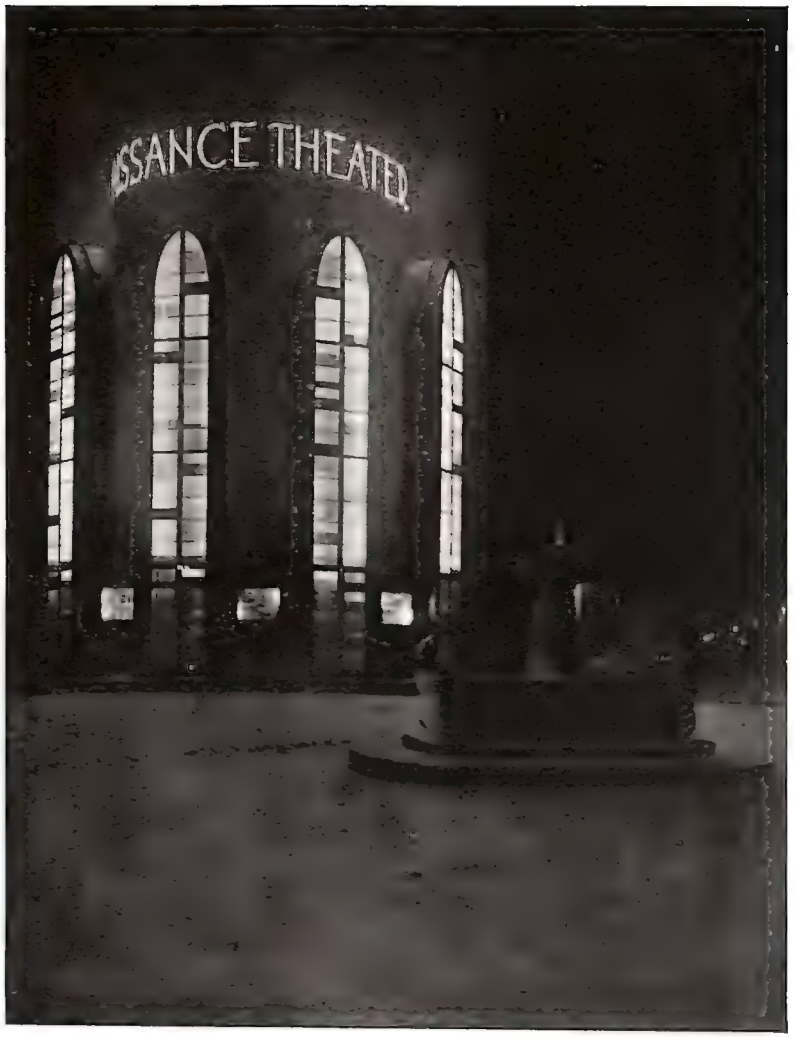


Figs. 9, 10 : Model of the TOTALTHEATER.
Designed by *Walter Gropius*.



Figs. 11, 12: Exterior lighting effect and underview of the *marquise*, THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris. *Charles Siclis, architect.*

Fig. 13 : Foyer, staircase and monumental nickel grille, THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris. *Charles Siclis, architect.*



Figs. 14, 15 : Two typical "night façades" by *Oskar Kaufmann.* The KOMÖDIE and RENAISSANCE THEATRES, Berlin.

German model to conceal a bridge that accommodates the majority of the lime-light and flood-light projectors. The drop-curtain can be raised vertically, or opened laterally ; and allows of any desired contraction of the stage, of which the dimensions are 22 metres width by 21 metres depth. There are four mobile platforms, the area of each of which is equal to half the area of the stage. These weigh 40 to 50 tons apiece, and are suspended above the stage in pairs, like lifts, by eight powerful, counterweighted steel cables. All scene-shifting is done mechanically by hydraulic power. Twenty battens, each carrying a weight of 300 kg., can be flied by a single stage hand at a speed of 1 metre a second ; whereas under manual operation forty scene-shifters would be required to do the same work.

The seats (Fig. 36) are full-sized armchairs, and not those detestable, time-dishonoured *fauteuils*. This was one of the many " minor " details to which the Baron Henri de Rothschild, who is of generous girth, gave unstinted personal attention. The result of this triumph of matter over mind is that the seats of the *Théâtre Pigalle* are the most ample and comfortable of any theatre or cinema in the world. Their model is already becoming standardised in an international sense : a benefit for which it is hoped future generations of playgoers will not cease to laud and magnify the " good " Baron's name.

The fact that every seat in a cinema must, irrespective of its price and position, command an uninterrupted view of the screen has had a very salutary effect on recent theatre design. The old convention which forced the occupants of seats at the extremities of the horseshoe, and more particularly of the boxes, the highest priced of all, to sit uncomfortably askew if they wished to keep more than a part of the stage in view, is now happily becoming a thing of the past.

Too much of an individualist to work in the impersonal terms of orthodox Modernism, Oskar Kaufmann, in the half-dozen theatres he has built in Berlin and Vienna since the end of the war, attempts nothing that is very revolutionary in a structural sense. But in each of their interiors ornament blossoms spontaneously from structure as inevitably as effect from cause. The prodigal fertility and delicate refinement of his decorative schemes are always in perfect unison with the scale of his auditoriums. They are rippling trains of vital sparks which humanise and frolic with construction, not inertly redundant revetments of steel and concrete skeletons. No more personal buildings exist. He has held and weighed them one and all in the hollow of his hand till the nice equilibrium of the individual and the impersonal has adjusted itself. Yet withal, though of no particular age or school, they are wholly of to-day. The reflorescence of civilisation stands between them and all the ornamental *clichés* which held sway before the war. The master-craftsman's hand, lovingly touching in each least detail and imparting a separate identity, a sovereign grace, to the most minor fitment, has orchestrated their contrapuntal integration into a reverberant aria which trills for very *joie-de-vivre*. The greatest living *maestro* of pure design, Kaufmann is incidentally—but only, as it were, incidentally—a fine and extremely competent architect. No decorator has ever excelled his architectural sense of the theatre. An essentially dramatic quality, volatile as comedy, witty as apt dialogue, informs the *décor* of his *ensembles*. There is nothing interchangeable about his work. Not one of his motifs would be equally at home in another of his interiors. The proscenium of the *Kurfürstendamm Theater*

(Fig. 16) is a little masterpiece of dramatic design, an exquisitely appropriate *tour-de-force*. Or take the façade of his *Komödie* (Fig. 14), a moon-struck maiden in her nightdress. Here the sheer power of fantasy has known how to obtain a nocturnal effect, wholly different from, but in no wise sacrificed to, the diurnal. The charm of the one does not eclipse, but is rather complementary to, the charm of the other. Each is co-equal and independent. Like two parallel straight lines they are doomed never to meet or coincide, but only to enhance each other. See how delicately and surely the more dramatic neo-Baroque mouldings of the narrow tower-like front are etched in by the evocative glamour of the flood-lighting ! The balance of voids and solids is transposed. Detail salient by day becomes muffled by night, and vice versa. It is a vision of a fairy world, an illuminated pavilion gaily decked with airy Maria-Theresan *chinoiseries* in some discreet corner of a palace park. Yet in point of fact this elegant princely " folly " lies on what is now the chief thoroughfare of Berlin, the broad and blatant nineteenth- and twentieth-century *Kurfürstendamm*, sizzling with its Neon advertisements and uproarious with thronging trams and motor-buses.

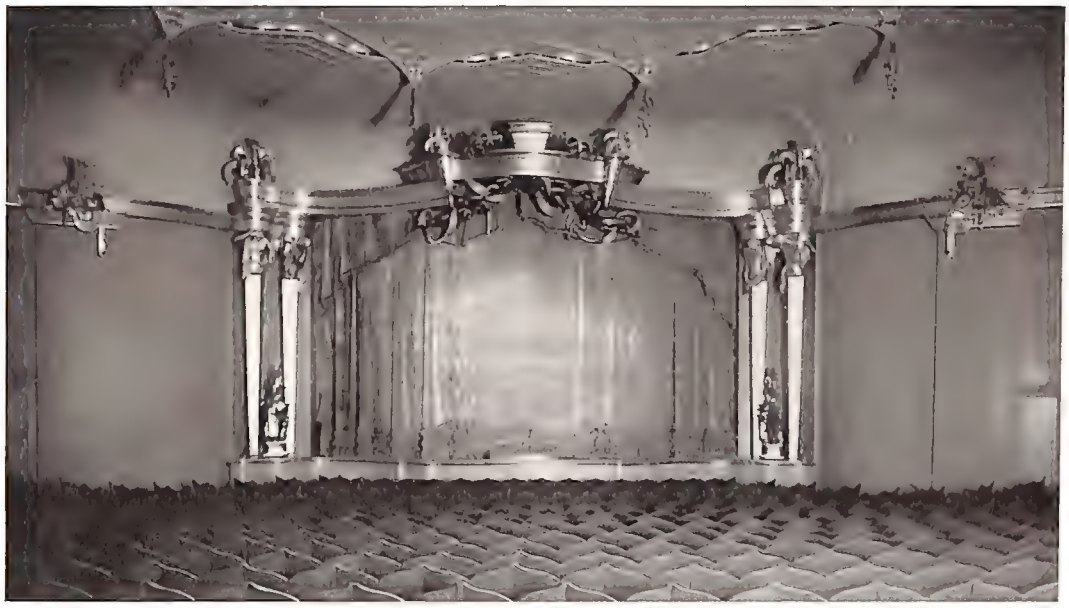
The Ziegfeld Theatre in New York (Fig. 8)—a well-composed, though not particularly felicitous Modernist façade : yet one that certainly wears something of the provocative and slightly sinister ambiance of the stage-door about it—also relies solely on flood-lighting for its night architecture. This only augments the coarseness of its cornice of pendentive swags.

The rejuvenated " Savoy " in London (Figs. 37-41) is a vivid, warm and comforting piece of work. It reminds us that even architecturally England is still somewhere on the map. An ironic anachronism condemned the inauguration of this delightful transformation scene to provide the setting for a revival of those heavily dated Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which rely for their support on the most reactionary theatre public in London.

It may be regretted that the exterior of Louis de Soissons and A. W. Kenyon's Welwyn Theatre was not more in harmony with their Shredded Wheat Factory, but the paramount claims of " amenity " apparently decreed that all the civic buildings of that garden city must wear a uniform, neo-Georgian dress. The interior—in which acoustic devices are skilfully used as decorative features—is as good as it could be, and can stand comparison with anything abroad (*see* Figs. 19 and 35).

It is pleasant to know that a theatre has been specially built in Fascist Rome for the production of Pirandello's plays, but nothing in the interior design of this rather rakish little neo-Baroque *Teatro Odescalchi* (Figs. 27 and 28) would suggest it. If ever a dramatist required a neutral and impersonal stage setting, it is the one who wrote " Six Characters in Search of an Author."

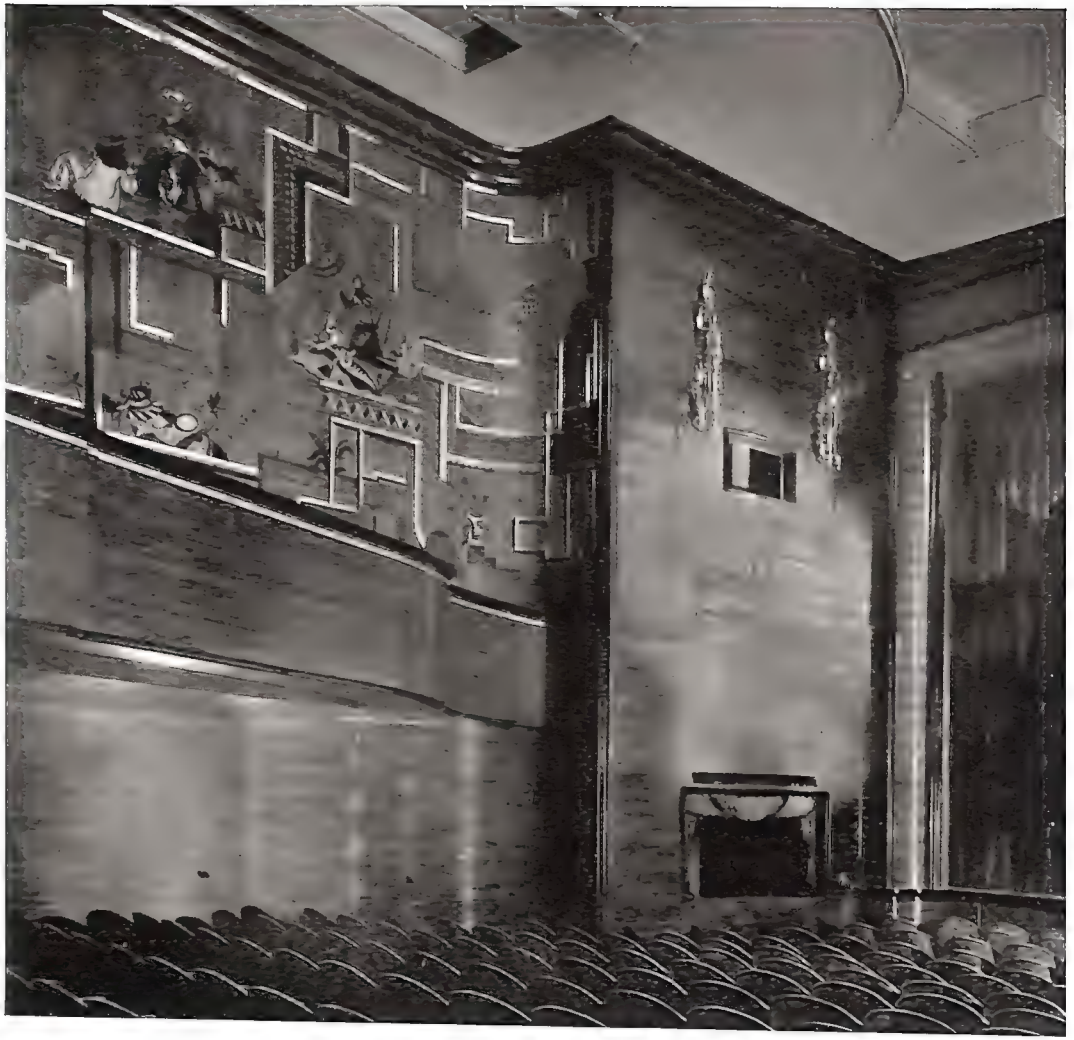
Miss Elizabeth Scott's new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, now under construction, promises to be as fine an example of Modernist theatre architecture as anything hitherto built or planned abroad.



Figs. 16, 17, 18: Proscenium opening and detail of boxes, THEATER AM KURFÜRSTENDAMM, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*

Fig. 19 : A view of the proscenium from the balcony, WELWYN THEATRE, Hertfordshire. *Louis de Soissons and A. W. Kenyon, architects.*

Fig. 20 : The ellipse of this charming box-office entrance is delicately reflected in its decorative details. KOMÖDIE THEATRE, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*



Figs. 21, 22 : Two typical Kaufmann details, showing his mastery of amusing neo-Rococo motifs. (*Left*) the RENAISSANCE and (*right*) the KOMÖDIE THEATRES, Berlin.

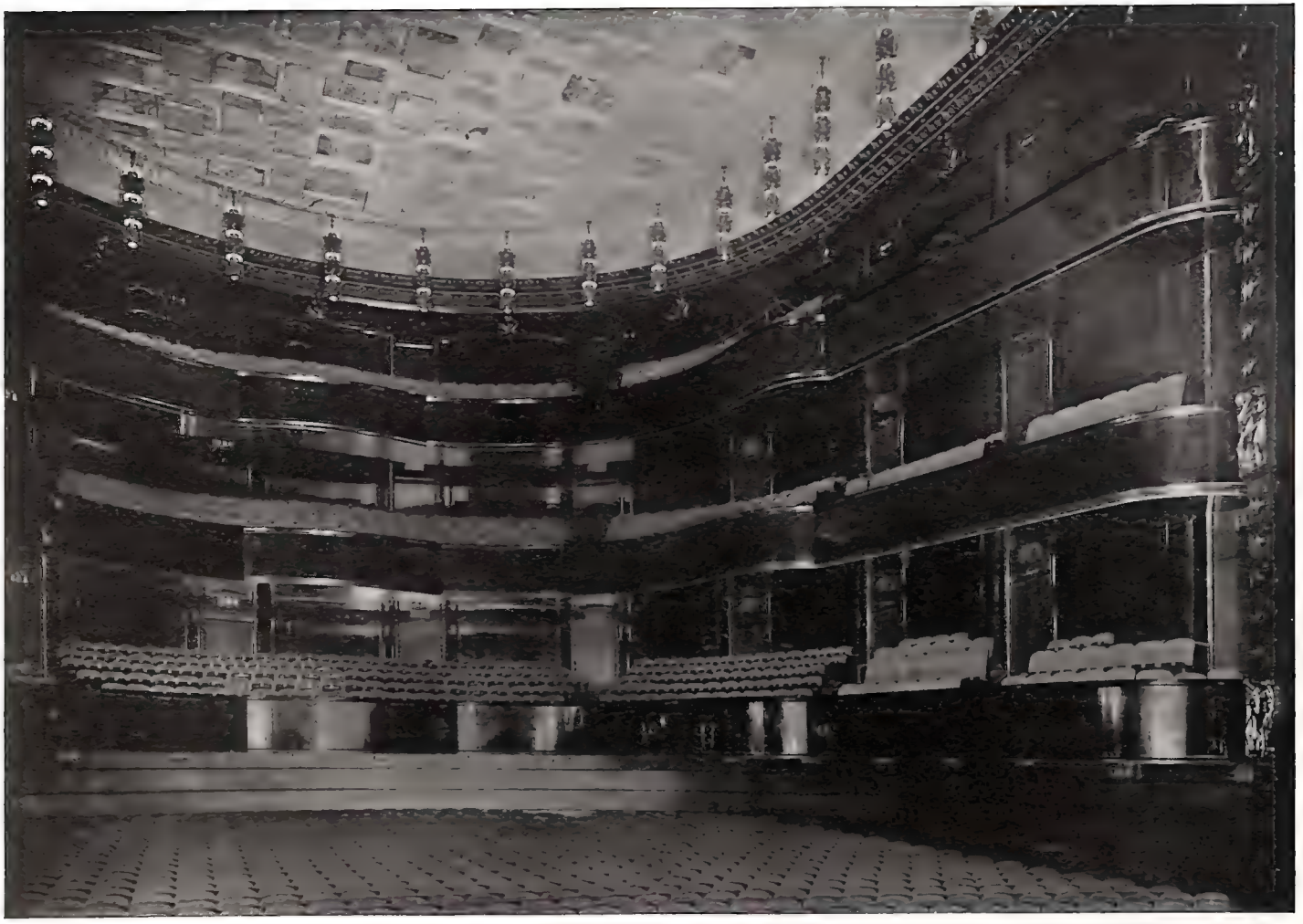
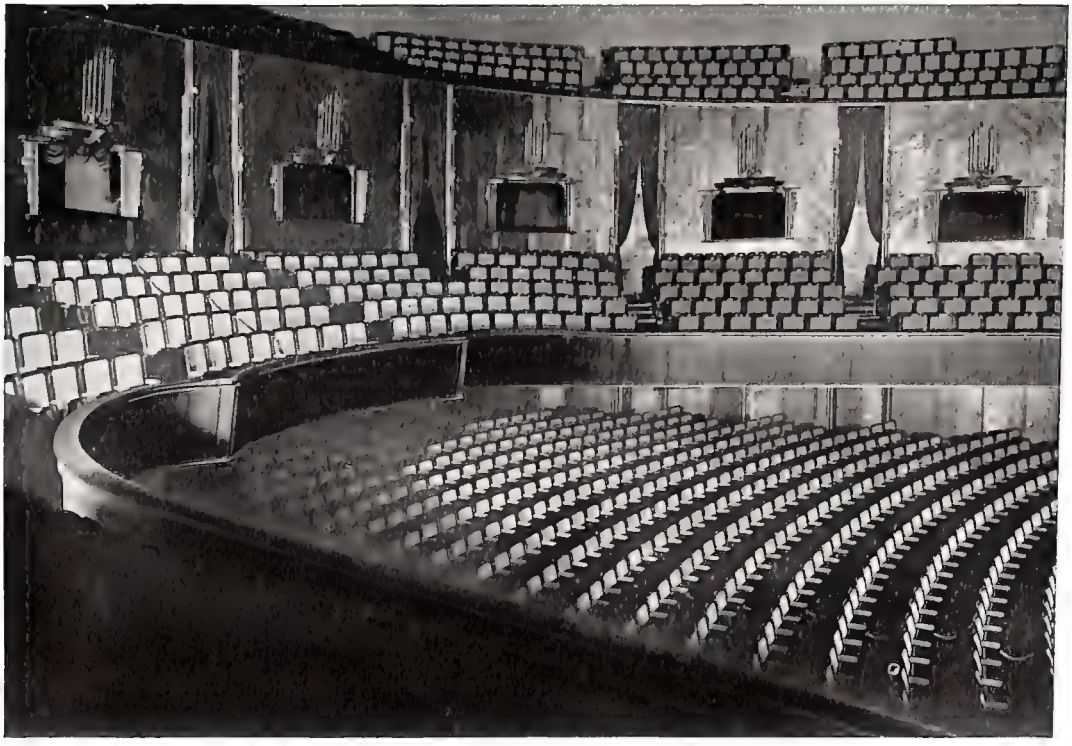
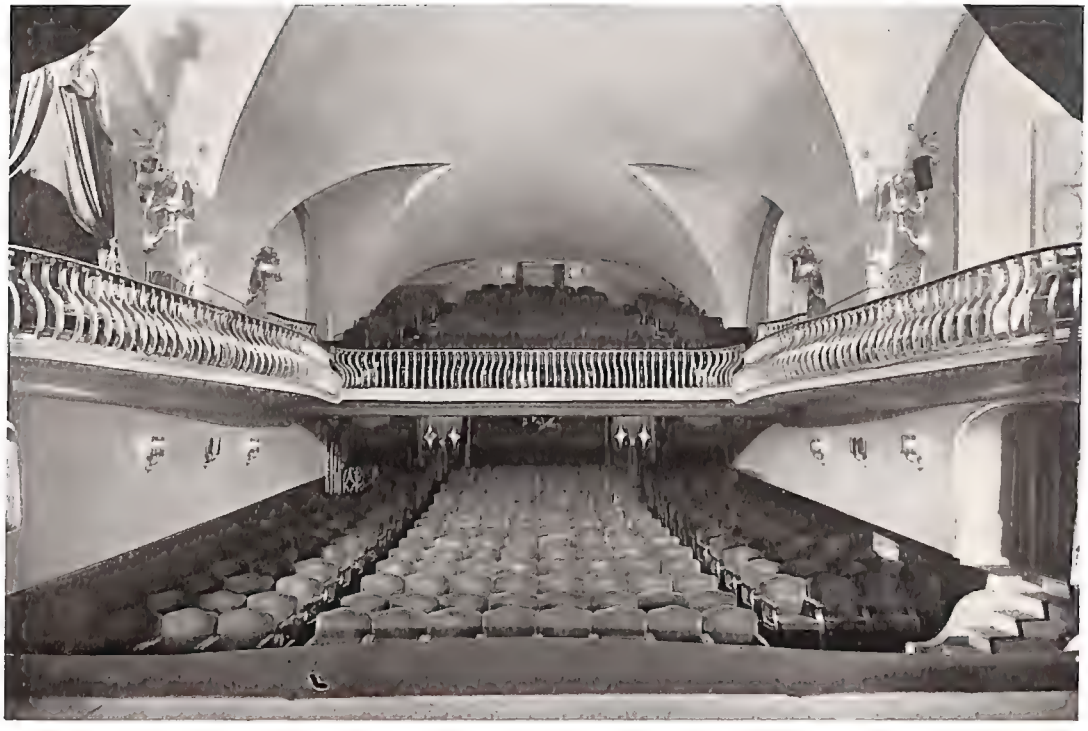


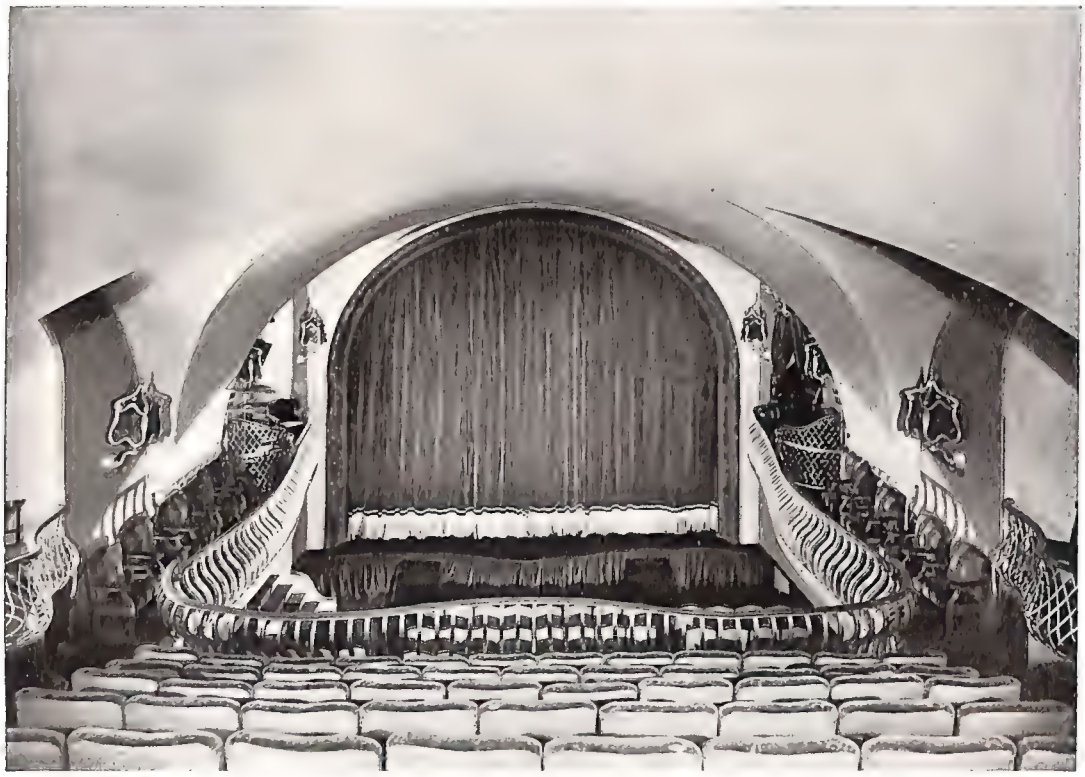
Fig. 23 : Kaufmann's refurbishing of a large, traditional auditorium. The VOLKSBÜHNE, Berlin.



Figs. 24, 25 : Two more Kaufmann interiors. (*Above*) KOMÖDIE, showing the central chandelier ; and (*below*) the KROLL OPER, Berlin. Note the lighting sconces in the lower picture.

Fig. 26: A well-handled semicircular promenade with an effective pattern of voids and solids. The KROLL OPER "FESTSÄLE," Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*





Figs. 27, 28: An Italian version of "neo-Baroque," charming in its way. The TEATRO ODESCALCHI, Rome. *Virgilio Marchi, architect.*

Figs. 29, 30 : Promenade details of the GROSSES SCHAUSPIELHAUS, Berlin. Notice the fountain type of indirect lighting in the columns shown in the lower picture. *Hans Poelzig, architect.*

Figs. 31, 32 : Two masterly examples of handling large expanses of almost unfenestrated wall surface. (*Above*) the GROSSES SCHAUSPIELHAUS, Berlin. *Hans Poelzig, architect ;* (*below*) The KROLL OPER FESTSÄLE, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*

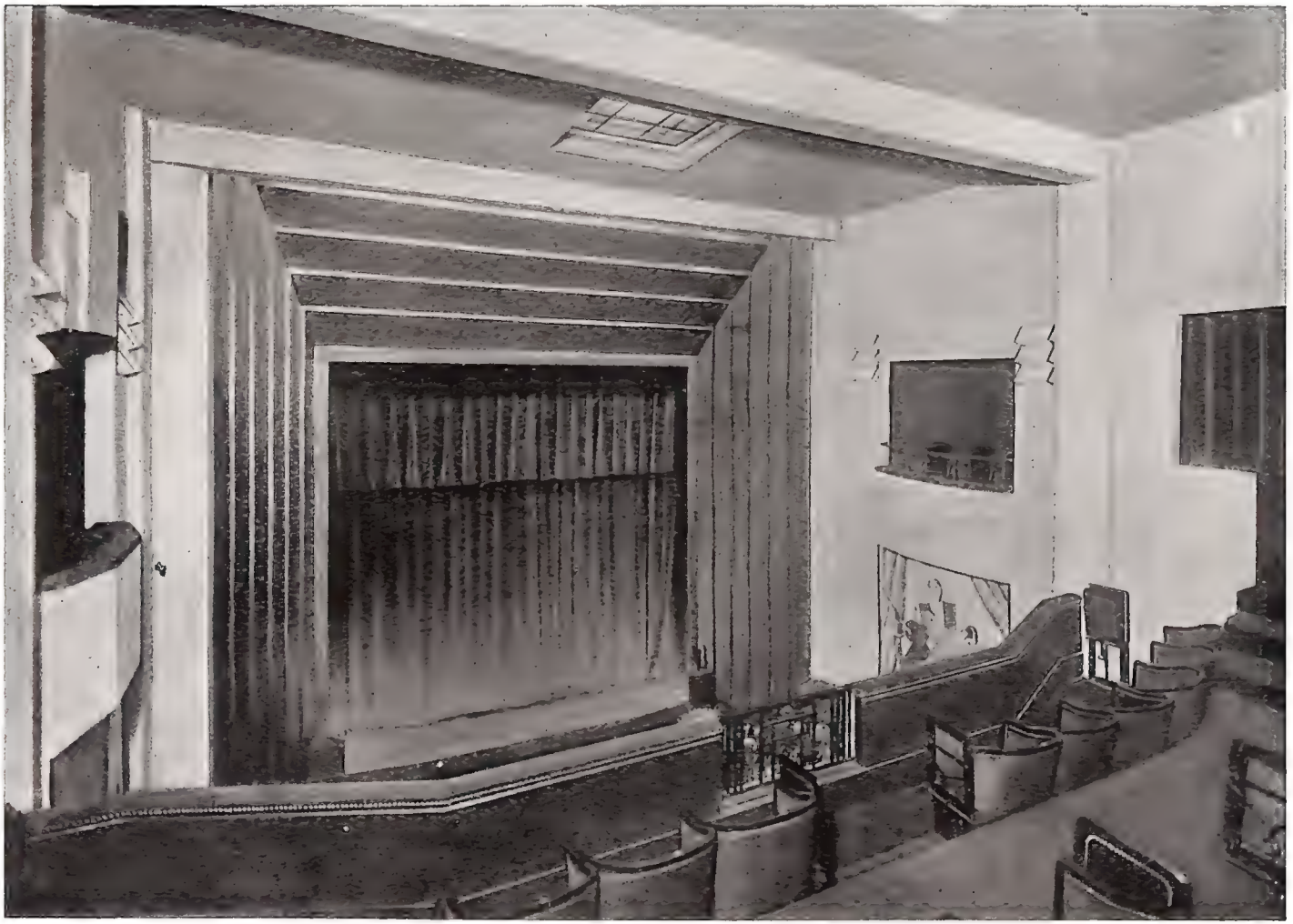


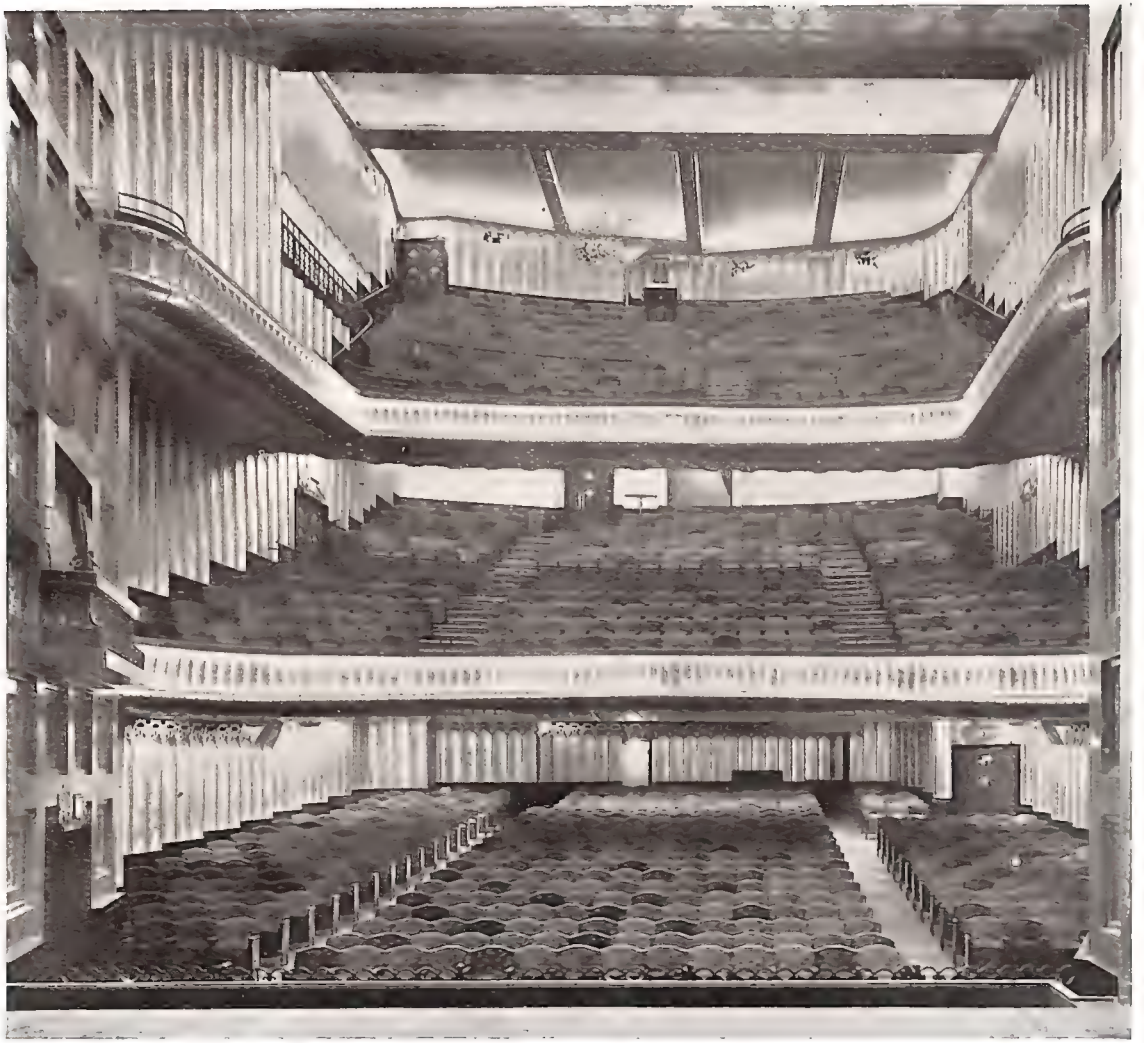
Fig. 33 : The simplicity of its decoration does not detract from the intimacy of this small theatre. THÉÂTRE DE L'ŒIL, Paris. *R. R. Delahalle, architect.*

Fig. 34 : An exemplar of achieving the most with the least. A refined and interesting façade. THÉATRE DES MATHURINS, Paris. *Charles Siclis, architect.*

Fig. 35 : In the WELWYN THEATRE acoustic devices are used as decorative motives. The canopies produce particularly charming shadow effects. *L. de Soissons and A. W. Kenyon, architects.*

Fig. 36 : The back portion of the auditorium of the THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris, showing the sweep of the circles and the now famous " new model " stalls of the Baron Henri de Rothschild.

Fig. 37 : A typical example of the interplay of shadows due to modern methods of lighting. The new SAVOY THEATRE, London. *Frank A. Tugwell, architect. Decorations by Basil Ionides.*



Figs. 38, 39 : Detail of the one box, and general view of the auditorium, new SAVOY THEATRE, London. The seats are upholstered in various plain colours to produce a cumulative scheme.

III

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE CINEMA

THE soured and aged declare that the spread of the picture-going habit is responsible for the decay of home-life. Probably the reverse is nearer the truth : that it is just because home-life has lost so much of its spaciousness and attractiveness that the cinema-going habit continues to find fresh adherents. For the experts assure us that even with the present phenomenal rate of construction, " saturation point " is not yet within sight ; and that there still remains " an untapped *clientèle* of more cultivated [we hope they mean " more modern "] taste."

The cinema, whether taciturn or chattersome, fills a need in our lives which no preceding age has ever felt. This need the theatre can never hope to answer, while broadcasting only does so partially and without satisfying our gregarious instincts. There is something formal and ceremonious about going to the theatre. It is an occasion, an event. It implies more careful attire, if not evening dress. We do not say casually " Let's go to the theatre ? " as we say " Let's go to the pictures ? " if only because we are most of us in the habit of booking seats in advance for some particular play. Few of us are indiscriminate enough to sally forth at the last moment to see which theatres have still tickets available. On the other hand we are ready to drop into any old cinema on any old pretext, at any old time, and in any old clothes. The cinema may, and often does, show eminently " serious," and so-called " educational," films—" Young Crocodiles' Teething Troubles," " The Life-History of a Cake of Soap," and what not—but we do not go to the pictures in a serious spirit, or with a thirst for acquiring improving knowledge. On the other hand, grotesquely sentimental or crudely anachronistic films can be openly derided as (in deference to the physical presence of their actors) a bad play can hardly be. The studied decorum, the polite social gathering atmosphere, of the theatre and concert hall are wholly lacking at a spectacle in which the players only appear as photographic shadows of their corporeal selves.

The cinema is primarily a sort of public lounge. It is a blend of an English club and a continental café ; at once the most public and the most secluded of places. It has affinities with both church and alcove. One can go alone, *à deux*, *en famille*, or in bands. One can take one's children there to keep them quiet ; or one can take one's girl there to be quiet oneself. Punctuality and decorum are of little or no consequence. One can drop in and out at will. In England, though in practically no other country, one can smoke there. One can chew sweets, or peel oranges, or manicure one's nails. One can proverbially filch ideas for a new dress, or " get off " with one's neighbour. One can enjoy a little nap as easily as the luxury of a good laugh or a good cry. In wet weather it is an escape from the rain ; in winter a means of keeping warm. Schoolboys, whose holidays are drawing to a close, know that prevalent epidemics can often be caught there. The cinema is a pastime and

a distraction, an excuse for not doing something else or sitting listlessly at home. A dinner party misses fire, expected visitors suddenly telephone their inability to come to tea—" What about a cinema ? " One has a spare hour or so on one's hands ; just time enough not to be able to do anything else comfortably. So one goes to the nearest picture-house, which is seldom very far away except in the country, and lets a few hundred feet of film unwind before one with casual or rapt attention as the case may be. As a building, therefore, the cinema should be as informal, impersonal and devoid of unnecessary pretensions as a public-house—which is really what it is, alcoholic associations apart.

Thus the cinema clearly requires a type of architectural expression utterly different from the theatre. The theatre—abroad at least—has a certain civic dignity which it must live up to as " a public edifice." Whereas the cinema is an undress, workaday sort of optical lucky-dip. The theatre has its traditions, and they are on the whole formal ones. The cinema, an essentially democratic institution for all its brave show of royal splendour, has as yet as good as none. It is at one with the socially go-as-you-please age we live in : a symptom and a symbol of it. Except for the infatuated " movie-fans " who loyally follow a star's screen career from bible class to bridge cheat, it emanates no glamorous atmosphere of past associations and personal triumphs. But as we are a conservative, rather inert and not very logical or imaginative people, our cinemas are only just beginning to shed the worst and most garish features of the Edwardian music halls on which they were so supinely modelled. What can be more ludicrous than such a heading as " Another Super for Snobston : 3000-seater ' Megalomanic ' to open next week," which is a commonplace of cinematograph papers ? We do not speak of super-theatres, super-hotels, super-office-blocks or super-shops. Besides size and gaudiness have increased so continuously since first this senseless and vulgarian pleonasm was invented that the latest examples of tastelessly wasteful construction might proudly claim to be super-super-super-cinemas if only the jargon of fulsomeness were sufficiently accommodating. If the phrase meant anything at all it would be that the building to which it applied was a masterpiece of architecture, designed by a very superman among architects. Whereas in the great majority of cases its plans have been worked out by some local quantity surveyor [1] who had to hand over its empty shell to be decorated by a firm of shop-fitters or upholsterers. A cinema may be large or small, stupefyingly gaudy or ingratiatingly simple (the last is rare indeed in this country), but it remains a cinema just as a railway station remains a railway station irrespective of whether it serves Godmanchester or Devil's Bridge, Glasgow or Dorking.

The capitalistic god-parents of picture houses are rarely content to call them such. The name of a locality used to qualify the simple word " cinema " is the exception rather than the rule. Something far more pretentious and " colourful " is desired, a something which resonantly echoes the *folie des grandeurs* of primitively bombastic minds. But if buildings got their deserts, the houses to which such

[1] A curious superstition persists in England that a surveyor is *ipso facto* an architect. This is very much as though the fact that a man had the right to describe himself, and practise, as a dentist signified that he was also a fully qualified surgeon and physician. Probably this legend will only die a natural death when, if ever, an Architects' Registration Bill is passed, limiting the legal use of the term " architect " to those who have satisfied the R.I.B.A. that they are competent to exercise this profession.

magnificent or picturesque titles as " The Palladium," " The Lido," " The Regal," and " The Splendid," are applied would in more cases than not be known as " The Indigestium," " The Yahoo," " The Meretricious," and " The Strident." Why " Locarno " should be such a popular name for provincial cinemas, dance halls and skating-rinks is one of the many intriguing mysteries of modern folk-lore. Let us hope that reputed connoisseurs of the *beaux-arts*, like Sir Austen Chamberlain, the sardonic Monsieur Aristide Briand, and the late Herr Stresemann felt duly flattered !

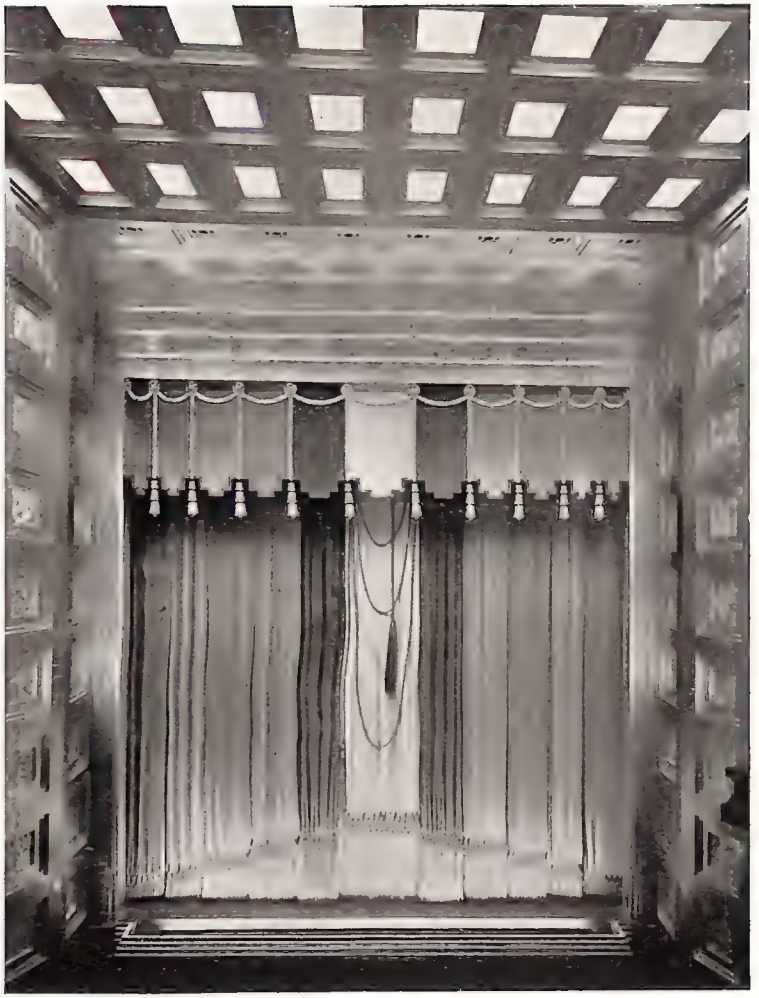
To understand how and why the cinema has become what it is, it is necessary to see it in proper perspective to the period which witnessed its evolution. Up till a few years before the war, the film was little more than a scientific toy, a hybrid of the eighteenth-century " Diorama," and the magic lantern of nineteenth-century explorers' lectures and exemplary Sunday School treats. Seated before these " animated pictures," we were thrilled to ride on the cow-catcher of a locomotive through cavernous tunnels and over precipice-spanning bridges ; or to catch speckled glimpses of Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand. Gradually, the bioscope, as it began to be called, developed a " news sense." True, it was a crude enough one, but its novelty sufficed to interest us. Its " topical budgets " were shown impartially in the small converted halls known as " electric theatres " and music halls secure in the enjoyment of a virtual monopoly of popular amusement.

In these early days the obscurity on which the technical operation of the cinematograph relied was found to be fraught with grave moral dangers for " young persons " by the type of social reformer for whom every pebble is a potential pitfall, enormous in its offence. The police could be made to patrol the parks against the public outrage of private love-making ; they were not empowered—more was the pity—to crawl about under picture-gazers' legs in order to restrict their degrees of propinquity. So the Unco' Guid cried aloud for surprise bouts of plenary illumination, and higher and harder separating arm-rests, modelled on those with which the beadles of the Borough of Hampstead obligingly separate public seats into half a dozen kennelled units of regulation rump breadth. The " promiscuity " of holding hands, with all its legion perils to the adolescent soul, it was declared, must be prevented at all costs. They might ultimately have had their way, as insignificant but noisy minorities so often succeed in doing in this country, had not the war intervened. Indecently clamorous for war-work of a restrictive nature, the dour old harridan Mrs. Grundy assumed the skittish *nom-de-guerre* of " Dora," and got busy with her broom. But in her new rôle she had to be content with serving the Higher Morality of Don't and Shan't, not for its own dear sake, but simply as a means of increasing Christian efficiency in disembowelling with the bayonet, shell-turning and asphyxiating-gas distillation. She could not close Pandora's box. The cinema had come to stay. Soldiers—who often spent most of the precious hours of leave within these hospitably darkened precincts—insistently demanded cuddling facilities, which even that benignant and universal firm of tuck-shop providers for weary warriors, the Y.M.C.A., could not quite bring itself to place at their disposal. The cinema afforded what the canteen and hostel denied them. Marriages, undoubtedly pre-ordained in heaven, and less official or abiding unions directly

inspired by the Prince of Evil, that active ally of the Central Powers, were brought sensibly nearer consummation before the flickering screen. Depopulation and repopulation had become burning public questions. Vigilance committees had to deflect their attention from eager watchfulness for "objectionable" films to the problem of war babies, and even—so bitter were the exigencies of belligerency !—care for their mothers. Illegitimacy—already a favourite theme of film-producers in still peaceful California—began to lose its sting in view of the brisk prospective demand for cannon fodder in the next war to end war. Like the life-sentence convict, but unlike the homicidal maniac, the nameless man-child was not to be debarred from the *dulce et decorum* of the highest privilege of citizenship. Spiritual values were readjusting themselves to the actualities of national necessity. Strange transformations were witnessed. Morals were anything but "as usual." While theatrical companies could hardly be kept together owing to the insatiable demands of the recruiting authorities, the cinemas continued to "do their bit." Far from keeping anyone out of the trenches, they were commandeered to appeal for volunteers to fill them. And when conscription superseded voluntary enlistment, their screens were used to stiffen civilian courage with officially edited scenes of glory, and invite the investment of savings in War Loans.

It was then that the cinema came into its own as an institution, as something which appeased the frantic craving everyone was obsessed by : the possibility of forgetting for an hour or two. The films were the only efficacious opiate, the one form of dope generally available which could still be had without restrictions or ration cards. They provided the crude and potent anodyne of knockabout comedy and sentimental love stories. When even the most optimistic and unreflecting were ceasing to believe that virtue always triumphed over vice and right over might in real life, as the war years had revealed it to them, it was more than ever necessary to be able to believe that this still invariably happened in the world of illusion. America unfalteringly delivered the goods. Indeed, Hollywood "five-reel soul-dramas" were probably her greatest contribution to the maintenance of Allied *morale*. In the enemy countries conditions were much the same. Only there, thanks to the blockade, "pictures" had to be home-made. This proved to be the foundation of the great German film industry.

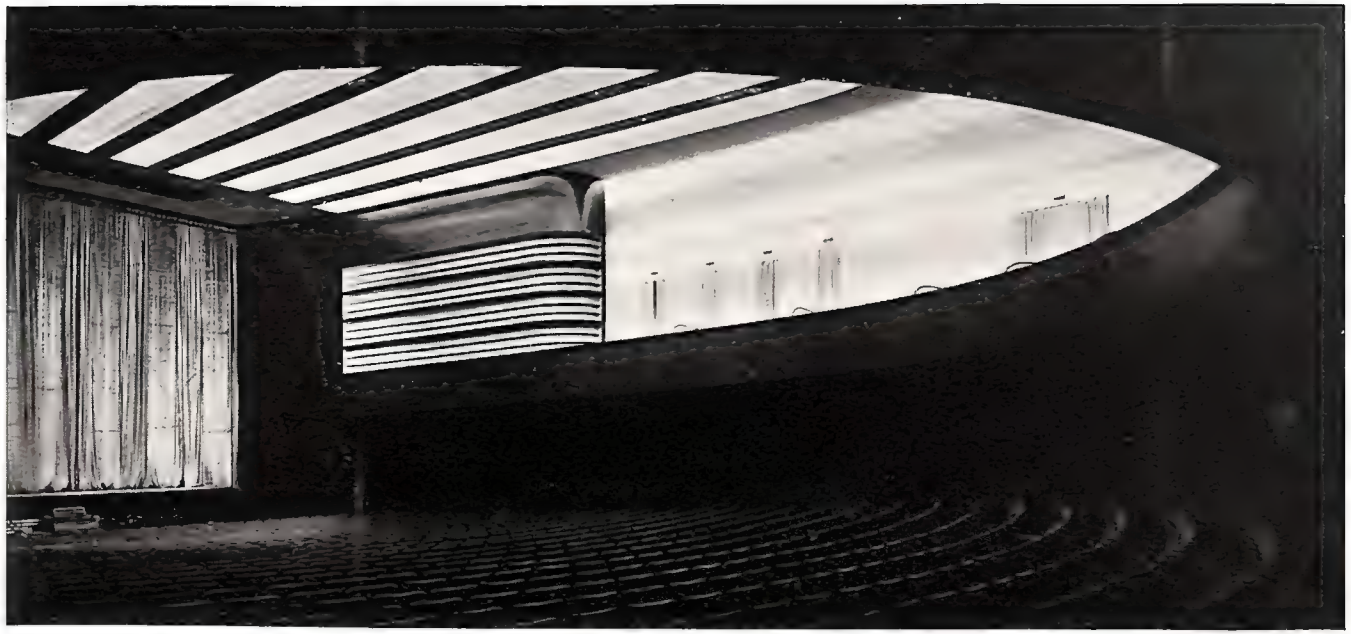
After the war, those lucky enough to have survived, or escaped, the Great Donation of the Elders had had enough of senile leading-strings and grandmotherly Nosey-Parkerdom. Enthusiasts for public-house restrictions and purification of the parks had admitted, a trifle unguardedly, that they had envisaged in the Kiné-má (as they usually pronounced it) a mighty instrument for moral betterment on evangelical mission lines. They now discovered they were impotent to prevent an anything but docile and Little-Goodie-Two-Shoes young England making a very different "home from home" of it. In default of those Elysian homes that were the promised sweets of heroism, homeless heroes dreamed in it of their 2 recep., 3 bed., and usual offices, castles in Spain. Lovers of the working classes, harried from the parks, sought asylum in close-up cycles of "continuous programmes." "Parlour houses," that exasperating complication of cheeseparing municipal housing schemes, had become superannuated before their construction could be resumed. The young couples, whose courting parlours had been designed to



Figs. 40, 41 : Detail of staircase and curtain, new SAVOY THEATRE, London.

Fig. 42 : Greta Garbo Talks ! A rather lymphatic crowd awaits the hundred-dollar-a-syllable voice.

Fig. 43 : Gala-night in Brighter Birmingham. In the words of Mallarmé : "On comprend si bien le *pourquoi* du plaisir ! "



Figs. 44, 45 : A magnificent and daring example of light and shade contrast. The scimitar-like sweep of the balcony is in itself a powerful contribution to the composition. *Below :* the entrance foyer, showing an echo of the same structural-decorative audacity. UNIVERSUM CINEMA, Berlin. *Erich Mendelsohn, architect.*

Fig. 46 : An excellent example of the gradual narrowing down for both decorative and practical reasons of a wide proscenium-opening to the requisite dimensions of the screen. ATRIUM CINEMA, Berlin. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.*

regularise ever since the Industrial Age began to defile the circumferences of our towns with labyrinths of mean by-law streets, now found more comfortable tryst in the nearest " picture palace."

By the close of the first post-war decade the cinema had obviously become a direct reflection of the tastes of the younger generation. The presence of the older was a matter of sufferance ; its criticism of indifference or hilarity. Campaigns against " suggestive " films—those which glorified crime escaped serious attack until very recently, apparently because they were regarded as a modern substitute for what schoolmasters used to call " healthy books of adventure "—have proved such dismal fiascos that our self-appointed moral mentors ought to be beginning to realise that, to be successful, education of public taste needs to be of a more tactful, a more constructive and a more modern nature. The twentieth century refuses to be spoon-fed with the frowsy ideals of the nineteenth. The Film Censorship, a legacy of the latter, has become a scandalous farce. " The Gold-Diggers of Broadway " hits the deck. Whose fault is it ?

At the end of the war the film had sufficiently perfected its technique for almost unlimited possibilities to lie before it. The age, in fact, had created something that might be destined to become its characteristic art-form, something which the dead hand of the past could neither check nor control. All nations clamoured for films. None of them could have enough. The heathen took to them with even greater alacrity than they had taken to bibles, gin and bowler hats. No one paused to think of what would be the effect of the white man revealing the secrets of his alcove to " races in an inferior stage of development." On the Continent, architects like Mallet-Stevens began to turn their attention to designing Modernist settings for film scenarios of the type with which " Metropolis " has familiarised us. Cinemas began to be built in England as formerly chapels had been : here, there and everywhere, to any and every sort of design, and often to no design at all. English theatres and music halls had rarely been built by qualified architects. The bad old tradition was continued with the cinema.

The more articulate and less suggestible part of the film public in the chief European countries began to weary of American cowboys. The cinema had reached a stage when the more educated classes of the older nations could contribute to, and derive profit, from it. In self-defence they were obliged to found their own film industries. Propaganda was still in the air. Every country wanted to tell the world of its own customs and achievements as America had alone been able to do in the past. The vanquished of the Great War found a means of stating their case which the Treaty of Versailles had denied them. Conquered yesterday, their films are conquering us to-day. Cinematographically speaking, we are between the hammer and anvil of American and German films. The masses still instinctively prefer the former, reflective and cultivated persons are more and more turning to the latter. Profiting by Russian examples, Germany is trying to make the film a vehicle—even the primary vehicle—of modern culture instead of a mere stimulus to modern sensationalism. And Germany has obviously got something to give the film which America has not. England, in spite of Mr. Anthony Asquith's praiseworthy efforts, has hardly spoken as yet. If we do not soon begin to make up for lost time it may be too late to be worth trying to. And we *have* got

something to put across the film that could eclipse every other country's contribution if only we knew how to express it.

The present age is singularly intolerant towards all forms of sham and snobbishness. Moreover, as we have already said, the cinema-going public is predominantly a youthful one. There are signs that it will not tamely submit indefinitely to the anachronism of following the *mises-en-scène* of its favourite producers, and the rôles of the stars that are its idols, in buildings which supinely re-echo the outworn wedding-cake pomps of Edwardian pretentiousness. Then our film magnates may have to face some angry shareholders' meetings. The younger generation is already beginning to learn that modern architecture and modern decoration are expressions of its own conscious, or subconscious, ideals ; whereas fakes of moribund classicism express nothing but the fussy and servile pedantry of the last.

IV

THE CINEMA CONSIDERED AS A BUILDING

We are all of us privileged, if we will, to watch the evolution of cinema design, for an important (if only in the sense of capacity) picture house is opened about once a week. And about once a year a cinema is completed that is important architecturally, and which, like Mendelsohn's Berlin *Universum* (Figs. 44, 45) represents a new phase in design. Hitherto the latter have always been foreign buildings, but there is no reason why this should continue to be the case. Let us have faith in the native genius of our own country, and not be so foolish as to assume that everything done abroad is bound to continue to be superior to anything British. We have (potentially) as good young architects as any other nation. Give them the chance they need. The new "Olympia" annexe has already shown what they are capable of.

Considering the importance of the German film-making industry, it is not surprising that such a large number of new cinemas should have been built in that country. Owing to prevalent financial stringency, new and more economical methods of construction and types of decoration had to be devised. In the worst slough of the inflation period, when bankruptcies were the order of the day, Kaufmann was busy decorating the auditorium of a large Berlin playhouse with deal boarding and zinc plating ; though it would need a very practised contractor's eye to be able to detect the use of these *ersatz* materials. Even if he had wanted to, the German cinema-financier could not have afforded to have his picture houses built by semi-skilled tiros and Jacks-of-all-trades like his relatively affluent English colleague. It is often a bad thing to have too much money at one's disposal where building is concerned. The fact that German builders had so little to play about with has been the making of modern German architecture. In no department of construction is this more evident than in the cinema.

A screen is quite a different thing to a stage. The first requires only a very modest area : width and height without depth ; while the second calls for considerable three-dimensional space, besides a platform and roof, provided with a certain amount of fixed equipment. A small stage, though possessing certain advantages in the case of *théâtres intimes*, and for *Kammerspiele* and plays with very short castes, inevitably limits the scope of dramatic production. We are, however, probably now on the eve of considerably larger screens, which, experts say, the rapid technical perfection of stereoscopic films will demand. From the point of view of auditorium construction, the real difference between the stage and the screen is that while it is an advantage for the spectator to be as near the former as possible, this is a direct visual disadvantage with the latter. Thus the cinema imposes on the architect a choice between a certain waste of seating space in the interval separating the proscenium from the first row of the stalls, and recessing the screen far back

into the proscenium opening by various architectural and lighting devices. The second of these alternatives appeals strongly to architects like Friedrich Lipp, who achieve this object—the Berlin *Atrium* (Figs. 46 47) (where, as in the *Titania-Palast* (Fig. 79), the breadth of the screen opening conceals the organ), and Breslau *Capitol* (Figs. 49, 50, 51), are both good instances—in an often masterly manner by progressively narrowing down the proportions of the frame of the proscenium, with the result that the auditorium as a whole gains enormously in spatial atmosphere and architectural significance. The rising orchestra floor is only a silly sort of circus conjuring trick, as functionally useless as the now obsolete revolving stage.

The cinema ought to be one of the types of building most characteristic of our age, if only because our age is identified both with the invention of the cinematograph and the phenomenal expansion of the film industry. Unfortunately, however, in England its design still wearily rings out the changes of already obsolescent theatre models. With the possible exception of Nonconformist chapels, no class of edifice represents quite such a degraded general level of design. But what was true of yesterday need not be true of to-morrow. Indeed, there are signs—the as yet unfinished, and very German-looking, " New Victoria " Cinema (Fig. 1) is one of the most encouraging ones—that the inevitable breach with past traditions, which, with our panic dread of change, we have done our level best to put off as long as possible, is now at hand. The older cinemas were tawdry to a degree. Having been mostly converted from other uses they had that to excuse them. The newer *ad hoc* buildings more often merely vie with one another in that *nouveau riche* ostentation which their patrons are invited to envisage as " the last word in luxury."

" With no crystallised opinion and no definite standard of taste to check the vulgarity of many designs," says Mr. J. R. Leathert, our foremost cinema-architect, " it is a matter of congratulation that the level of the bulk, low as it is, is not even lower."

" The conclusion to which I am driven," the Editor of *The Architects' Journal* recently wrote, " is that our exhibitors as a body have not yet awakened to the (commercial) importance of architecture. There are cinemas in which a quantitative excess of architecture tries to make up for a qualitative poverty that is often pitiable. There are others (and these are far more numerous) in which to witness a film is like eating out of a newspaper."

The trouble is that we have in England no real corpus of architectural criticism for the education of public taste. All our daily papers have duly accredited art, musical, dramatic, literary and film critics. None, as far as I am aware, has a regular architectural one. The design of our cinemas is part of the heavy price we pay for our public neglect of architecture and our national indifference to the now patent fact that architecture is the only one of the arts which has as yet fully succeeded in expressing the modern spirit.

The desire of the film-exhibitor being usually to disguise his picture theatre as a showman's booth, it is not surprising that British architects have so far had no adequate chance of trying to discover the cinema's most logical and satisfactory structural form. For one thing they are relatively seldom employed. With that hard commercial common sense which so often impels our wideawake business men to prefer amateur to professional talent—or, as the editor of a cinematograph paper

Fig. 52 : An example of how to handle the problem of the *marquise*, carried out in chromium steel by Messrs. Easton and Robertson at the new SAVOY THEATRE, London.

Fig. 53 : A classic exemplar of cinema decoration. The SKANDIA, Stockholm. *E. G. Asplund, architect.*

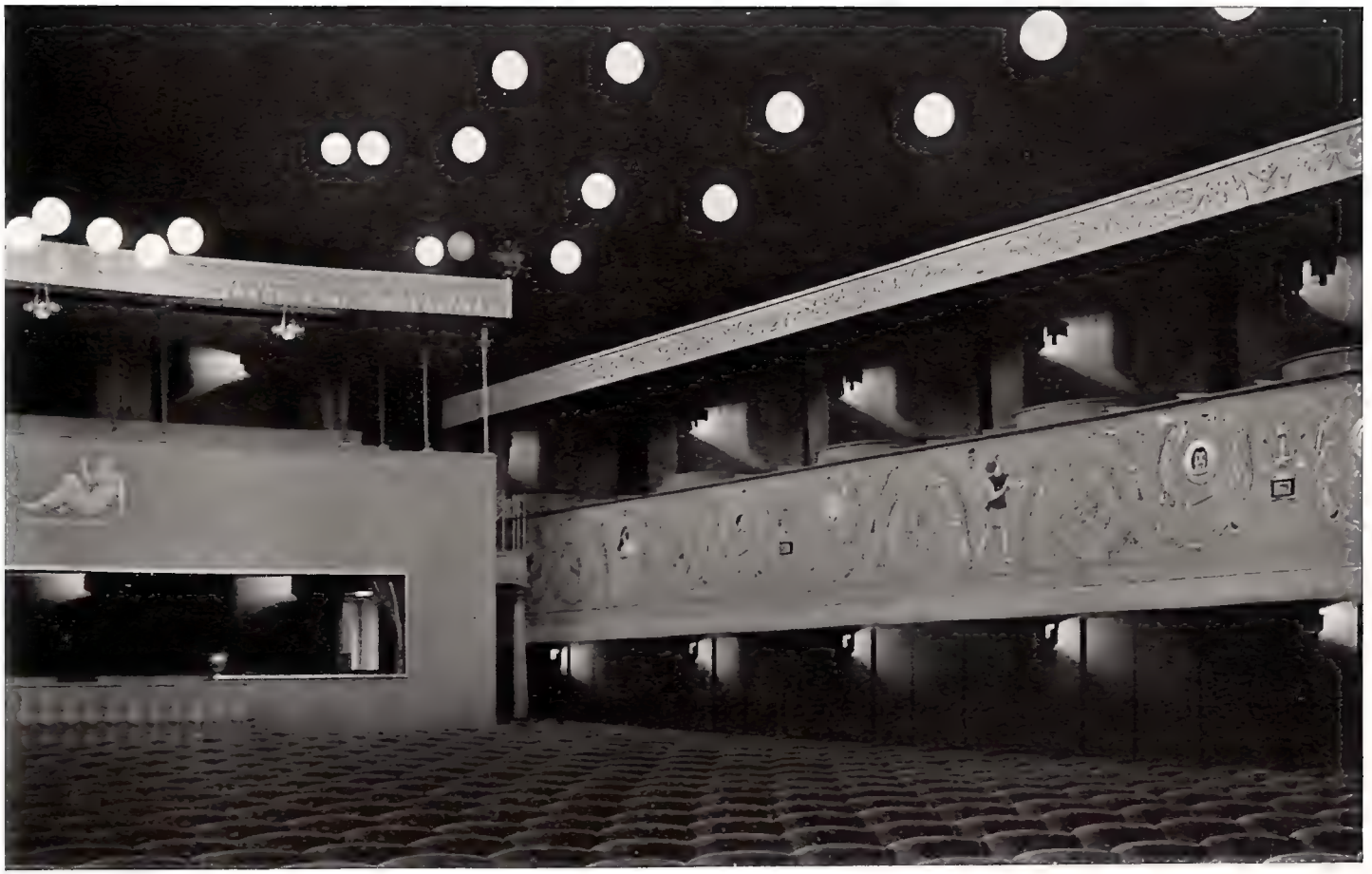


Fig. 54 : Another view of the auditorium of the SKANDIA, Stockholm, looking back from the screen. *E. G. Asplund, architect.*

Fig. 55 : A refreshing modern version of the caryatid motif in the balcony parapet of the ALEXANDRA CINEMA, Copenhagen. *V. H. Hammer, architect.*

Fig. 56 : The foyer of this theatre likewise reflects the Scandinavian genius for revitalising a traditional treatment. ALEXANDRA CINEMA, Copenhagen. *V. H. Hammer, architect.*

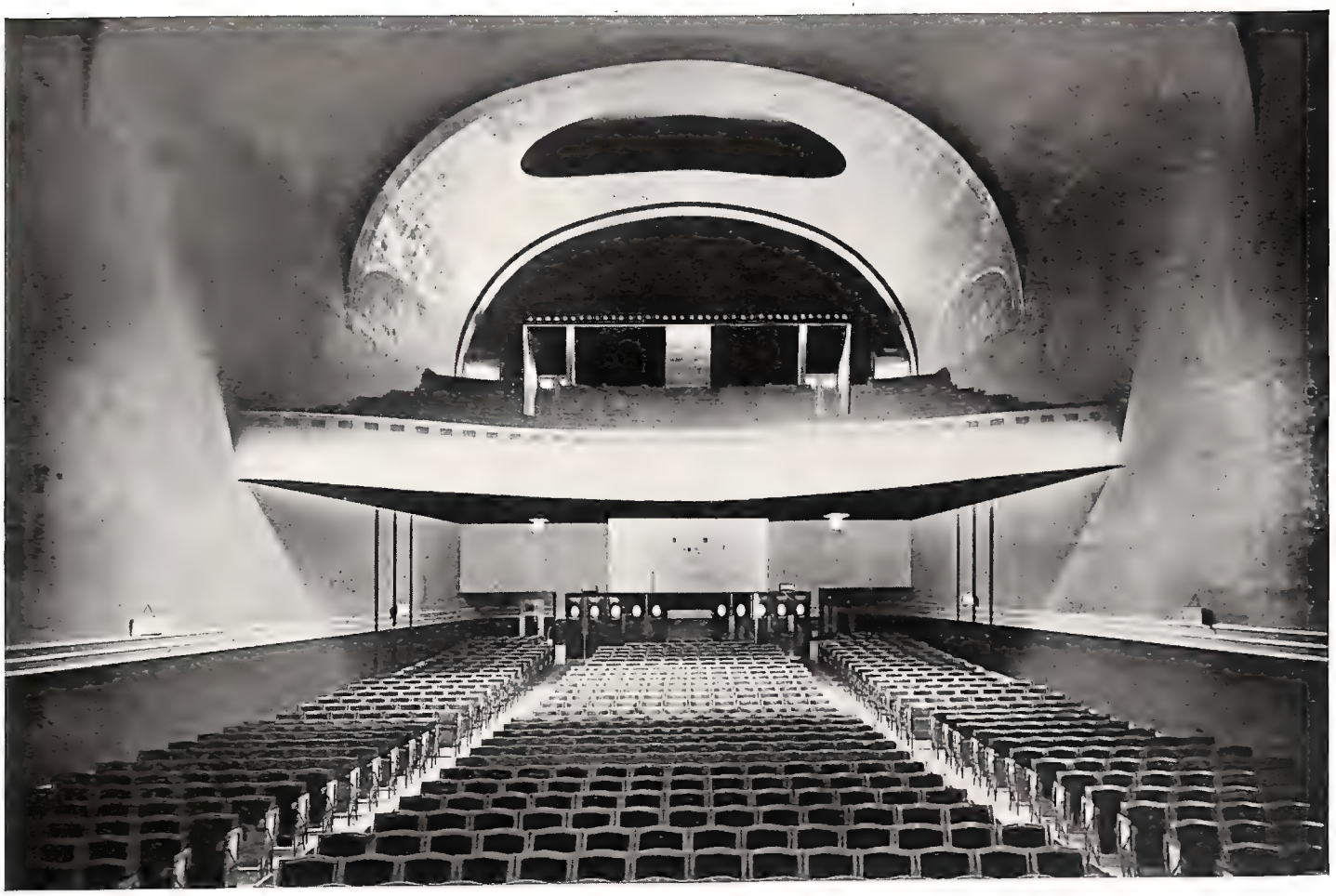


Fig. 57 : Uncompromising structural sincerity presents an interesting effect in *Henri Sauvage's* SÈVRES CINEMA, Paris. Once again, however, the problem of the balcony ends is shirked.

Fig. 58 : An outstanding example of a circular domed lantern at the UFA-CINEMA in the Turmstrasse, Berlin. *Fitz Wilms, architect.*

Fig. 59 : " Atmospherics " without sentimentality or structural falsity. Notice how the projectors are accommodated in the central chandelier which lends significance to the vast, plain plastered vault of the roof. The MERCEDES-PALAST, Neukölln, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

expressed it in a rather neat adumbration, " to engage the services of professional building designers "—the impresarios of the trade generally entrust the design of cinemas to the sort of men (usually quantity surveyors or constructional engineers) " who know what is wanted and have no nonsense about them." To assume, as did this editor, that gentlemen who consider they answer the description of " professional building designers " are necessarily " qualified architects," simply means that he does not know, or chooses to ignore, what a qualified architect is. Whether we like it or not, and whatever we may think of it as a professional body, there is only one Institute of British Architects in this country with official competence to qualify a man or woman as an architect. Thus every qualified British architect, it should hardly be necessary to explain, is either an F.R.I.B.A., an A.R.I.B.A., or a L.R.I.B.A. It would be instructive to know how many of the designers of our cinemas were entitled to add one or other of these three reassuring groups of letters after their names. No sensible architect, however able or eminent, would disdain a commission to design a cinema. The great majority of Fellows, Associates and Licentiates of the R.I.B.A. would jump at a chance which promised to give them so much technical scope. Fettered by the lamentably vulgar and (a far more damaging gravamen !) superannuated taste, or timorous decorative conventionality, of cinema-proprietors, it was till a few months ago rare indeed for *bona-fide* architects—in the few cases in which they were employed—to be allowed to discard those hackneyed Renaissance trappings and fly-blown " Oriental schemes of decoration " that their clients assured them the picture-going public was demanding more insistently than ever. Neo-Grec—or perhaps one should say " Negro-Grec "—and " the Egyptian Style," which were the order of the day for the first few years after the war, take an unconscionable time a-dying. In America, which, perhaps naturally, has remained our standard model in these respects, the meaningless parade of garish glitter has likewise been carried as far as the almighty dollar can carry it. The new " Empire " in London is the monstrous fruit of an Anglo-American collaboration between " specialists in cinema design." (By some miracle an Anglo-French architectural partnership in the Paris " Paramount "—a purely interior reconstruction, which is one of the most notable examples of the decorative use of sand-blasted and acid-engraved glass on a large scale—has produced much happier results.) It is bad enough that the " Empire " should be one of the most supremely *parvenu* buildings in the world. What is worse is that the enormous sum lavished on it has only helped to make this glorified gin-palace more hopelessly out of date as a cinema than that *chef-d'œuvre* of Edwardian fruitiness, the neighbouring " Hippodrome," as a music hall. The strangest thing about our film magnates is their contempt for cost of construction and decoration, and the recklessness with which they throw about their shareholders' money in perpetuating the gaudy opulence of an already bygone age. Even when recourse is had to " modern motifs "—or rather the clumsy cribbing of the worst contemporary Continental work which passes current for such—as in the Marble Arch " Regal," the same strident bedizenment prevails. This building's complacently swaggering display of " the modern style " can be compared to the parodies of Savile Row sobriety which are exhibited in the shop-windows of Strand tailoring establishments labelled " latest West-End cut." The " Regal " looks as if it had been dressed

for its part as a flash gigolo by some " Alexander the Great " of the Edgware Road.

The first—or anyhow the first notable—English cinema to be designed by " a qualified architect " was Mr. Robert Atkinson's " Regent " (an appropriate name at last !) in Brighton. It had considerable decorative charm, even if it can no longer be considered as more than an interesting pioneering experiment. The pretext of a recent fire was eagerly seized upon to have the " Regent " " reconditioned "—whatever that curious journalistic phrase, which seems to have odd analogies with quarantine and disinfection, may mean—not, of course, by the original architect, but by someone or other who was, it need hardly be said, " a specialist." " The Regent has been made infinitely more " regal " as a result. So much so in fact that the building, as its present proprietors proudly claim, is " completely transformed." The new marquise—these entrance canopies are nearly always a weak part of English design, though Messrs. Easton and Robertson have provided very remarkable exceptions—is truly appalling. The " Carlton " in the Haymarket—the work of the same architect as the " Shepherd's Bush Cinema," which was awarded the R.I.B.A. gold medal for the best London building of the year in 1923—if not disclosing very interesting elevations, was at least representative of what may be called the highest level of West-End design. Its entire ground-floor masonry is now swathed in yards of crudely daubed cardboard and canvas to remind us of what Hampstead Heath looks like on a Bank Holiday. The present state of the " Tivoli's " machine-made " Adam Style " façade, completely obliterated by festoons of sky-signs, shows what lighting engineers are capable of when uncontrolled by architects. Another rather interesting recent façade, " The Commodore " in Hammersmith is best seen only from without. To enter is to be confronted with an orgy of " atmospherics," every whit as emetic in their reactions as the nougat and Castile soap frescoes of the Brixton " Astoria."

So uninspired, indeed, are our " Picture Palaces "—the very name seems to foredoom designers to false values—that the " Kensington Cinema," in spite of being a shocking breach of architectural manners, having regard to its site, till lately ranked among them as one of the more interesting and encouraging designs. In justice to its architects it should be said that their " Twickenham Cinema " (Fig. 77) is by far the best façade which any English cinema yet built can boast, and one of the few that can sustain comparison with current Continental examples.

" Often when a cinema is being planned," the manager of a leading firm of decorators recently wrote in a trade paper, " the question of decoration is overlooked [" overlooked " is good !] until the building is in an advanced stage of construction." This is expert evidence of something which anyone who has taken the trouble to analyse " the scheme of decorations " of the average English cinema must all along have secretly suspected. In what other country would such a state of affairs be possible ; where else such a romantic passion for amateurism, suitably euphuised as " free competition and equality of opportunity," be found among the business community ? The same decorator adds that he was once asked to produce " a Tudor effect in a Doric building." But this triumph of hybridism has now been eclipsed by the Modernist interior of the " Duchess Theatre," off Aldwych : a neo-Tudor building externally—looking like a new block of rooms in some Cambridge

college, "built in harmony with the old court"—which was designed to be "intimate" and merely succeeds in being "bijou."

It is scarcely surprising that the art of design, so fecund in this country in the eighteenth century, should almost have disappeared. The decadence from which British architecture is just emerging was largely the result of an inability to design. Academicism, which, as Le Corbusier says, is always looking backwards, has killed the resource and inventiveness of our designers with studious copyings and variata juxtapositions of the antique modes. While other countries had to start to learn this art anew in terms of the actualities and ideals of our age, we were still content to fob off the old egg and dart and Roman key dadoes as though they were immutable dogmas of design. If it is an architect's job to construct, an ability to design should be just as much part of his professional competence. Designing does not mean simply stringing together copy-book motifs grown familiar *ad nauseam*; it means informing function, or purpose, with appropriate and significant lineaments. Design is the art of economical and discreet emphasis. "*Surtout pas trop d'emphase!*" said Stendhal, reacting against the rhetoric of the last century. This should be the golden rule for cinema designers, for avoidance of false emphasis is only another name for restraint, without which no work can hope to have dignity or worth.

British picture houses need a drastic "Pride's Purge" to free them from the clogging dross of "period" reproduction and that craving for mere gaudiness which still strangles original design. Ultimately, the Wild-West showmen who are turning the Haymarket into a second Tottenham Court Road will discover the simple truth that good architecture costs no more than bad, that modern decoration, besides being rather less expensive than "the usual thing," has a superior drawing power; and that there's money in both. More reinforced concrete construction (which is not the same thing as steel girders encased and squared off with concrete) is needed. Reinforced concrete is the building material which has been invented and perfected by our age, and of which it is the logical structural expression. Used rationally, and not as a mere substitute, it entails a definite abandonment of the sentimentalities and inertias of the classical orders, because it forces the architect to think for himself, to create instead of copying and to redesign instead of merely adapting.

Came the "atmospherics," as Mr. H. G. Wells would say. The phrase is well suited to the nature of this nauseating stick-jaw candy, so fulsomely flavoured with the syrupy romanticism of popular novels and the "See Naples and die" herd-nostalgia which speeds Cook's conducted tours on their weary ways. "Atmospherics," or "outside-in" interiors as Mr. Leathert[1] wittily dubs them, are now reintroducing the type of "glowing" landscape which is no longer admitted even to that home of long lost artistic causes, the Royal Academy. Tom Mostyn's forsaken gardens were clearly in advance of their age. The old grocer's oleograph calendar blossoms anew, and the spirit of "At the Wicket Gate" returns to us, voronoffed, from Bournville, Eng. and Sobstuff, Ill. Our cinemas are being frescoed with sentimentalised Tuscan villas, Venetian canal-quay suspirations, Spanish patios in the gloaming, be-sheiked infinities of Saharan sand (well might

[1] It is all the more disappointing in view of this apt *mot* to find that Mr. Leathert has gone over to the enemy in his new cinema at Richmond. The interior of this building has been mordantly described as "architecturalised acoustics."

the carpenter weep to see them !) and hybiscus-wreathed coral island palm-groves at a speed which makes one feel that really hustling firms of ships' painters are being employed.

In more cases than not the wrong men are still being entrusted with the job of building and decorating our cinemas. As we have already seen, Great Britain is in the anomalous position of employing more unqualified than qualified architects. The former hand over the design of their decorations to various firms of shop-fitters, plasterers and upholsterers : people who should not be expected, or permitted, to undertake anything more than their *execution.* This inevitably results in duality, a discordant clash between exterior and interior. As a German architect remarked to me, " Your cinemas are not entities. They do not hang together. They are patchwork affairs." And he added, " It would seem that in England you are content with teaching architectural pupils planning and construction, and that you consider design extraneous to their work." But the type of mentality that is for ever lauding its own astuteness in " getting a little man from round the corner " to do this, that, and the other job, exults in the satisfaction of having been able to avoid employing a professional craftsman because, after dogs'-earing " Everyman His Own Lawyer," he naturally imagines that he, in common with Smith, Brown and Robinson, is perfectly capable of being his own architect.

With such a depressingly low level of design among British cinemas, it is heartening to turn to what is being done in the same field in a—nominally, at least—semi-bankrupt country like Germany. Here the outstanding specialist is Herr Fritz Wilms of the great Ufa Company, who has probably designed more *Kinos* (as they are popularly called) than any other man. It will make the managers of our big " circuits " smile pityingly to hear that he is a fully qualified architect, and would have had no chance of being employed had he not been. Though Wilms does not pretend to build " luxury cinemas," whatever they may be, his various *Kinos* have proved excellent investments for their proprietors.

In considering the present trend of cinema design, the fact that Modernist architecture has been adopted in Germany with far greater enthusiasm and on a far wider scale than here or in America must not be overlooked. Its introduction began so long ago as the period which immediately followed the end of the war. This was all the more natural because the financial exhaustion of the nation imperiously called for the simplest and most economical forms of construction and decoration. Indeed, the wonder is that any building at all was possible during the last decade, not that ten times as much should have been undertaken as in comparatively solvent France, which can still hardly boast a single really notable cinema. Many of the pioneers of Modernism and concrete construction were Germans : men who had been striving to rescue sincerity of structure and the beauty of plain surface and simple proportion from the welter of excrescent ornamentation which was sapping the vitality of architecture. They got their chance when the old *régime* was overthrown, and used it to the full. The official architecture of Kaiserism—not that it was really any worse than our own Imperial Edwardian style—with all that it implied in general taste, came to an abrupt end in November 1918. The red flag which the mutinous bluejackets from Kiel hoisted over the Berlin Schloss was the signal for a revolution that was to prove by no means an exclusively political and social one.

Fig. 47 : An auditorium view of the ATRIUM. Note the lighting of the central dome. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.*

Fig. 48 : The fantastic allied with extreme simplicity in the proscenium screen of the MARMORHAUS, Berlin. *Hugo Pal, architect.*

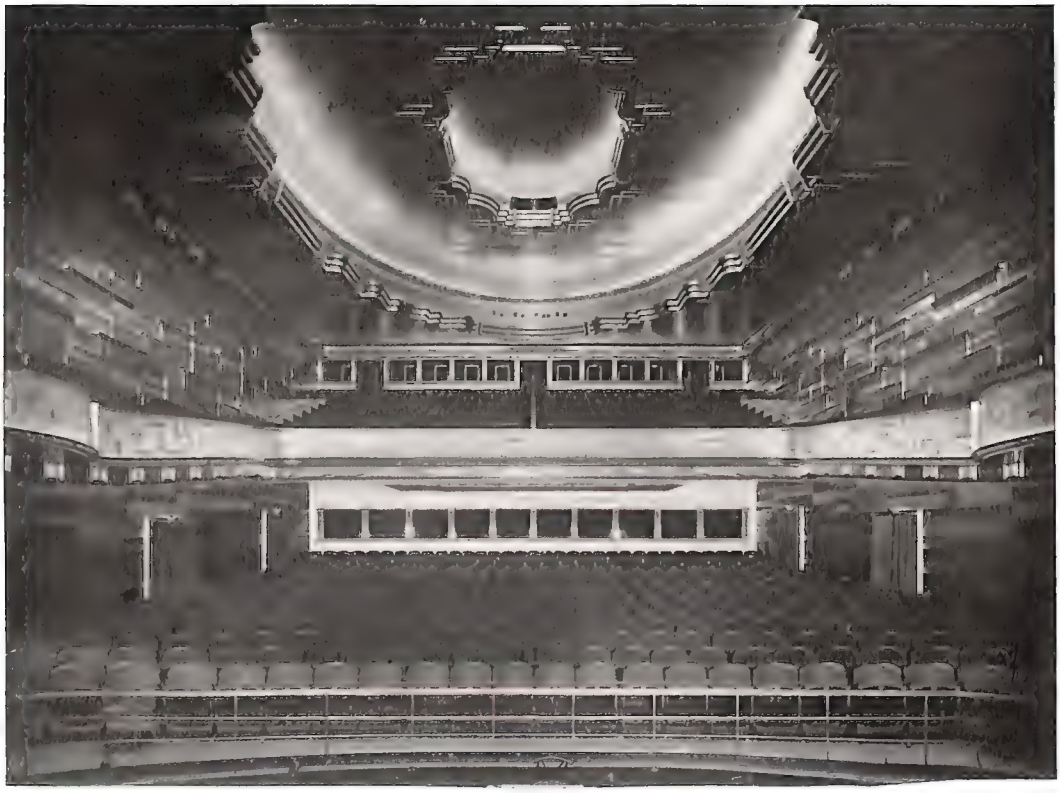


Fig. 49 : Auditorium view of the CAPITOL, Breslau. *Friederich Lipp, architect.* The dome is typical of this architect's skill in lighting.

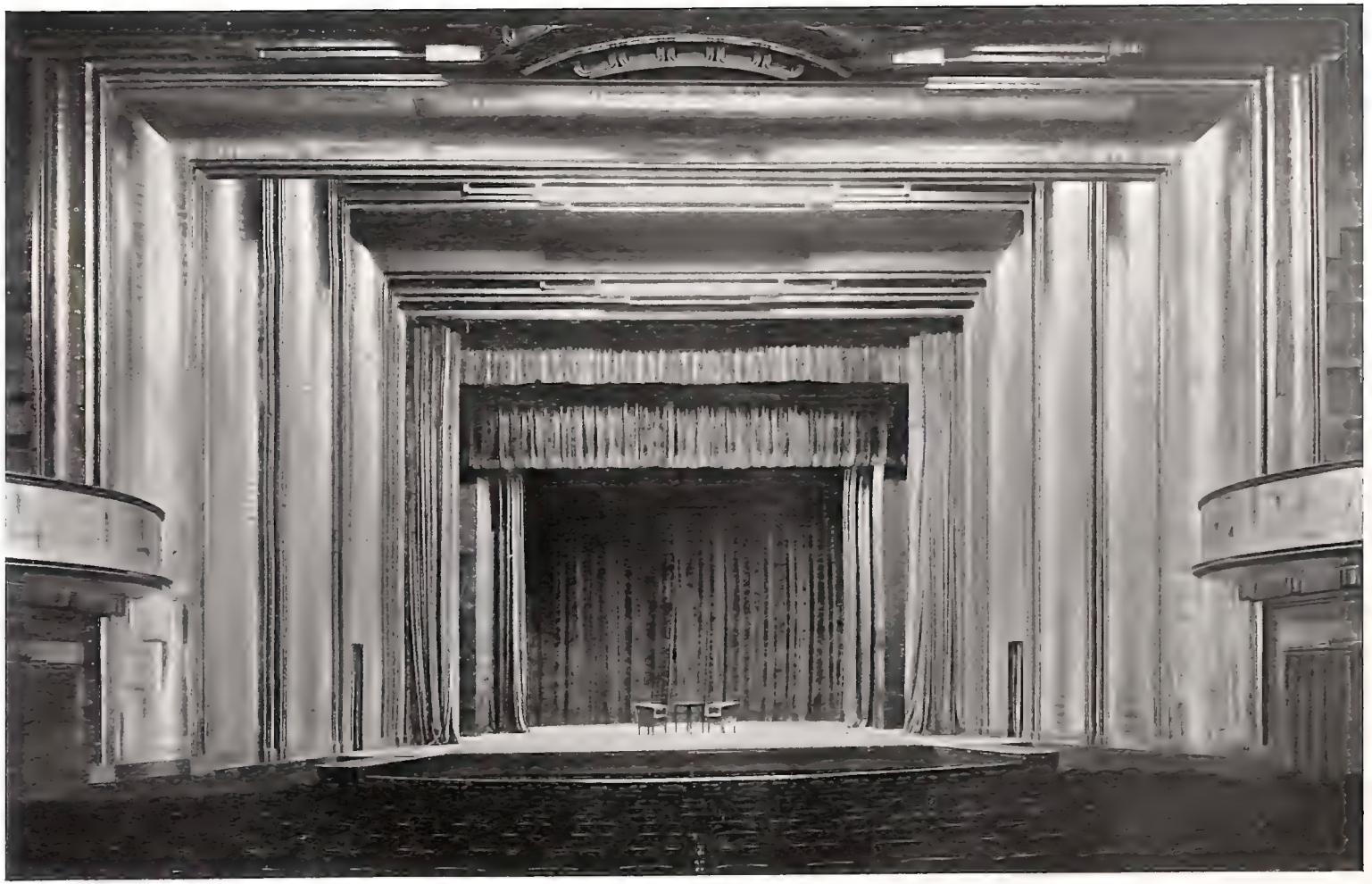


Fig. 50 : The progressive recession of the screen opening by a series of monumental bevels aptly attunes the scale of a vast auditorium to the modest compass of the screen. The CAPITOL CINEMA, Breslau. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.*

Fig. 51 : Side detail of the balcony of the CAPITOL, Breslau. Note how the series of recessed bevels enhance the lighting scheme by refraction. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.*

Concrete in German cinemas is used not only logically and fearlessly, but to the fullest limits of its constructive and plastic potentialities. This in itself connotes sobriety of design. Details like gallery staircases, for which that daring and skilful architect, Hans Poelzig—a man now over sixty—is justly famous, assume novel and often startling forms in this material (*see* Fig. 86). Structural sincerity, like virtue, is its own reward. One of the most striking things about these German cinemas is how few of them have seriously begun to " date " compared to contemporary British and American picture houses. Indeed, to use an Irishism, the best of the older Modernist buildings do not seem to have dated at all. Many of them which are now four or five years old might well have been opened in the present year of grace.

German *Lichtspielhäuser*, to give them their more official designation, have to express the spirit of this, and no other, age in the most direct and telling manner. They are invariably designed by fully qualified, and, as often as not, already celebrated architects (many of whom also hold the highest engineering diplomas), whose skill and resource are more than equal to the task. It is a humiliating experience to hear them talking about our " superannuated cinemas conceived by superannuated mentalities." Far from intruding their own taste, or decorative preferences, cinema-proprietors are only too ready to give their architects as free a hand in design as possible. This is probably owing to the confidence which German business men as a class feel in the ability of a competent architect to carry out his job most satisfactorily with a minimum of interference. They consider that, as a professional man and as a specialist, he is bound to know what is wanted better than they could hope to know themselves ; and that the result of choosing the right man, with the right qualifications, who is prepared to go in advance of public taste instead of tamely waiting on it, is pretty sure to surpass their rosiest expectations.

German cinemas cost much less cubic foot for cubic foot than do English ones. Indeed, very few of them cost as much as £100,000, which was the contract price of the Breslau *Capitol* (Figs. 49-51 and Frontispiece). They are every bit as comfortable to sit in. They show rather better films at a lower price. They command quite as good a view of the screen from any given part of the auditorium. Above all, they are far more impressive and stimulating architecturally for people with some artistic sensibility and a modern outlook on life than the average English suburban " Picture Palace," where vulgar imitation of palatial splendours too often mitigates against the proper technical projection of the picture itself ; or else totally destroys the atmosphere requisite to the proper appreciation of a fine film. There are no new " period " cinemas being built in Germany, or halls where those stereotyped " Renaissance " trappings overwhelm the spectator with an indigestion of gilt and glitter. " Atmospheric " effects, now so popular in England, have little or no vogue in the big German cities, where they are considered as a confession of the architect's inability to design an appropriate setting to his proscenium which will make a sufficiently imaginative appeal to the intelligent modern picture-goer. On the other hand, amusing schemes of decoration—usually tempera fresco conceits and bas-relief frivolities in coloured plaster of a neo-Baroque type, which are often Chinese in inspiration—are becoming increasingly popular, thanks to the rising influence of Viennese decorators.

Put baldly, the object of the German cinema architect is to design an appropriate hall to show films in, not a hall to attract the public by showing off itself. In other words, the function of the building is never made subservient to its *décor*. The nudity we have already commented on—Poelzig's cinemas are all finished internally in plain white plaster, or grey or buff stucco (*see* Figs. 84, 85)—is not merely an orthodox gloss of the Modernist gospel of bold, bare surfaces. Its application to the cinema is quite deliberate. Ornamental enrichment and " beauty spots " can be found in nearly every case. But this enrichment is not profuse and indiscriminate. It is carefully thought out so as to produce the maximum effect with the minimum of outlay, and not wantonly lavished, or aimlessly dissipated, in a riot of haphazard ornamentation and garish display. The parts chosen for the purpose are selected for what may be called—in a purely architectural sense—their dramatic appeal. Good examples of this are furnished by the twin organ grilles and the " Firmament " inset lighting of the *Deli* in Breslau (Fig. 86) ; and the rather Japanese-looking candelabra on either side of the screen opening in the Berlin *Capitol* (Fig. 111). The opulent " money talks " luxury and gaudy glitter of our own " Palaces " and American " Motion Pictures Houses " are considered hopelessly superannuated—relics, as it were, of the old, pre-war, semi-Victorian mentality with its morbid craving for heavy pomp and snobbish flamboyance. Any attempt to revive that sort of thing would result in empty houses. Germany is nothing if not desperately up to date.

Notable work has been done in adapting older, and by no means always very suitable, buildings into cinemas. Many of these gay and adroit refurbishings would serve as admirable models for village halls, or the type of unpretentious local picture house, that has often been improvised out of a disused chapel, found in small English market towns. The *Mercedes* (Figs. 60, 61), in the Utrechter Strasse, of northern Berlin—a house seating 2,300, with no fewer than eighteen exits—was built into the shell of an old iron foundry in under twelve weeks, start to finish. The *Rote Mühle* (Fig. 108), which seats 1,500, is a reconstructed dance-hall. Another type of work in which the younger German architects excel is modernising the fussy and loquacious façades of over-exuberant nineteenth-century buildings by cutting away unstructural excrescences like protuberant columns, massive cornices, and coarse stucco mouldings in heavy relief, so as to leave plain, well-proportioned wall surfaces. Though this drastic and salutory " sub-editing " has been chiefly applied to shop premises and blocks of offices, there are several outstanding instances of old theatres and music halls, and a few earlier cinemas, which have been successfully rejuvenated in this manner.

In Germany, screen surfaces are standardised as far as possible at 3·6 by 4·8 metres ; a screen opening some 22 metres wide—the actual breadth of that of the Turmstrasse *Ufa Theater* (Fig. 58)—being considered the ideal.

German cinemas are now always built of the galleryless type wherever circumstances are felt to justify the sacrifice of seating capacity involved. In other words, it is a question of site values in the neighbourhood in which a new cinema is to be built, and the size and paying capacity of its prospective *clientèle*. As in other countries, the question of gallery *versus* non-gallery is part of the larger issue of what is the cinema's ideal capacity. The idea now prevails that we have been building too

large houses, and that henceforth we shall have to curb our megalomania. German architects believe that a house seating about 2,500 will be the maximum future size. The galleryless Neukölln *Mercedes*—which, with its 3,000 seats, was for a brief spell, after it opened in 1927, the largest cinema in Europe—is considered a model cinema in plan. Its 37·50 by 44·0 metres auditorium can be emptied in between three and five minutes. The most ticklish detail in the design of any balcony-type cinema is the junction of the balcony front with the side walls. In England this problem is usually either shirked, or else botched up with some cartouche or other meaningless gadget. In Henri Sauvage's *Sèvres* in Paris (Fig. 57) the gallery is simply slung across the side walls like a hammock. Spectacularly, this is impressive enough, because the gallery has no visible means of support, but it results in a rather hard and ugly line.

The advent of talking films has entailed very little reconstruction in German cinemas, as nearly all of them were originally planned with due regard to acoustic properties owing to the fact that variety turns are often sandwiched in between the films. Their screens usually conceal properly equipped stages, which are readily convertible into ordinary theatres or concert-halls.

There are many more of those smaller, or, as they are called, " intimate " cinemas (such as the *Deli* in Breslau, Fig. 86) in the larger German cities than in ours. These often seat only a few hundreds, but they show some of the best (but not necessarily most popular or trumpeted) films, and charge their patrons considerably higher prices proportionately.

Cafés in Germany are too ubiquitous, and the café-haunting habit is too universal, for there to be any point in providing tea-shops under the same roof, though light refreshments (glasses of beer and sandwiches, etc.) are usually obtainable from the attendants. Interior doors communicating with adjacent restaurants—as in the case of Herr Wilms's Turmstrasse *Ufa-Theater*—are, however, fairly common. The less said about the design of English cinema cafés (as also of the fare provided in them) the better. The café of even so notable an English picture house as the " Twickenham " is lamentably like the all too familiar hotel lounge in its array of " rustic " wicker chairs. An excellent practical feature (necessitated by the rigorous German winters), which the larger *Kinos* have inherited from German theatre practice, is the custom of providing a cloakroom-peg for each numbered place—the number of which corresponds with the number of the row and the seat printed on the ticket itself (*see* Figs. 94 and 99). There is usually one of these counter-cloakrooms at each end of the stalls and gallery, so that one can always be sure of being near one's belongings. This results in reducing waiting, congestion, and confusion to a minimum. Another innovation which would be well worth copying in this country is the receptacle for a hat and coat fitted under every seat of the *Mercedes* in the Utrechter Strasse.

The worst of many objectionable types of gimcrack kickshaws to be found in certain English cinemas are those grotesque easels, placed in the foyers, on which are displayed in clip-on letters the titles of next week's programme, or the fact that refreshments can be had in the café upstairs.

One of the most amazing cinemas in the whole world is Asplund's *Skandia* in Stockholm (Figs. 53, 54), an auditorium which contrives to be essentially modern

without producing any discord with its exterior shell—a private mansion built about 1850. Like the *Alexandra* in Copenhagen (Figs. 55, 56), it is an example of that elegant modernism which we envy the Scandinavians for having evolved so naturally and, as it seems, effortlessly, from the lifeless classicism of the nineteenth century. There is no evidence of the defiance of revolt, the qualms of divorce. Growth has been uninterrupted by disruptive cleavage with tradition. The present emerges from the past as smoothly and normally as our Regency style emerged from our Georgian.

" Here then," says Christian Barman, " is a cinema, which, even now, in the second decade of cinema development, has already become a place of architectural pilgrimage. In the face of such a performance to talk of the architectural immaturity of the cinema is to talk of something that simply does not exist. This building is so perfect of its kind, and so satisfactory as a work of art, that it, together with a school, sufficed to raise its architect not merely to the highest rank in his profession, but to the position of an acknowledged leader and even to international eminence. Ineffectual sighting arrangements and unsprung seats are unable to diminish the popularity of this exquisite interior."

One wonders whether the " big men " who are now planning those " even more imposing links in the nation-wide chain of sumptuous supers " have ever heard of the *Skandia*. That they should have studied it is almost unthinkable. So little money was spent on its " appointments."

If the illustrations in this volume are predominantly German, the reason is that the general level of German cinemas is the highest in the world ; and that German architects have thought out the cinema as a new and untraditional type of building instead of tinkering with adaptations of the traditional form of the theatre, or aping the barbarous and suffocating magnificence of London, New York and Chicago " Palaces."

Figs. 60, 61 : Interesting "pattern" lighting effects are a feature of the MERCEDES-PALAST, Utrechter-Strasse, Berlin. Note the illuminated fountains at either side of the proscenium and the fretted and illuminated organ screens. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Figs. 62, 63 : A Wilms interior that shows the influence of Oskar Kaufmann. The PICCADILLY, Berlin.

Figs. 64, 65 : A successful, though economical, treatment for a small provincial cinema. The UFA SCHAUBURG, Magdeburg. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Fig. 66: A graceful day façade showing marked neo-Baroque influence. The UFA-CINEMA, Turmstrasse, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

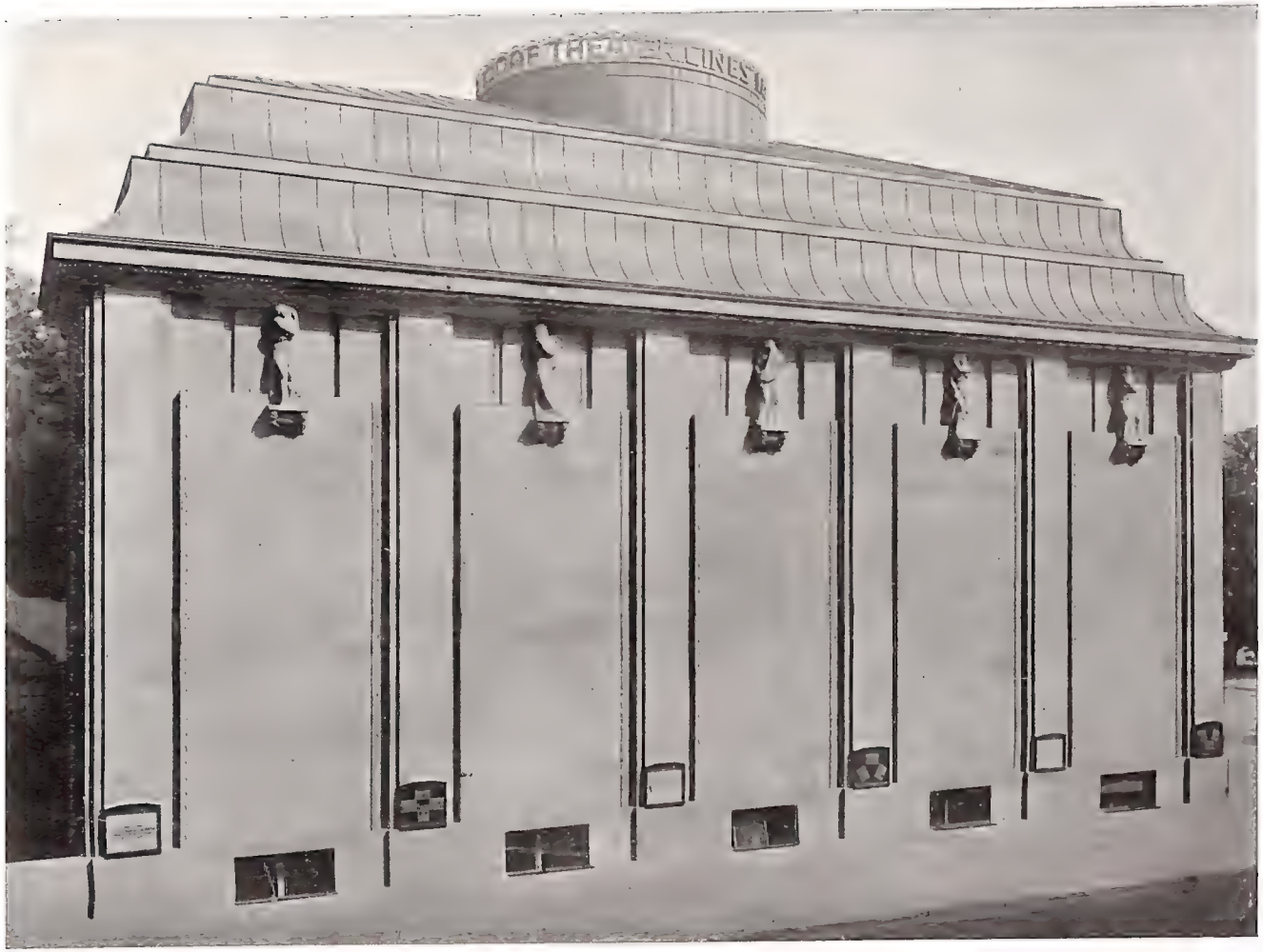


Fig. 67 : A distinguished example of an unfenestrated façade. The roof is of copper sheeting. Poster-boards form part of the design, and help to balance the voids of the ventilating grilles. CINES, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.*

Fig. 68 : A well-balanced, semi-classical façade almost ruined by the deplorable fascias of the shops on either side. The MERCEDES-PALAST, Neukölln, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Figs. 69, 70: A rounded corner treatment, slightly reminiscent of our own Queen's Hall, London, and more suggestive of a concert-hall, or opera-house. The "Colosseum" scale is somewhat overpowering for a cinema. ATRIUM CINEMA, Berlin. *Friedrich Lipp, architect.*

Fig. 71 : Night-Architecture : Night Publicity. The TITANIA-PALAST, Berlin. *Schöffler, Schlönbach and Jacobi, architects.*

Fig. 72 : An example of " night-architecture " achieved by a single unit of fenestration. The PICCADILLY, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Fig. 73 : A " neutral " façade, primarily designed as a background for " night-architecture." CAPITOL, Berlin. *Hans Poelzig, architect.*

Fig. 74 : A good example of a façade in which spaces for poster display have been made an integral and prominent part of the composition. MERCEDES-PALAST, Utrechter Strasse, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Fig. 75 : Towards simplicity. A smaller English cinema, still unfortunately the exception rather than the rule in its workmanlike unpretentiousness. TUBS HILL CINEMA, Sevenoaks, Kent. *Charles J. Cabbe, architect.*

Fig. 76 : Entrance, CINES, Berlin. *Oskar Kaufmann, architect.* A monumental entrance treatment dictated by a wedge-shaped wall area.

Fig. 77 : An encouraging example of English Modernism, slightly over-detailed. The wrought-iron infillings of the triple opening above the *marquise* do not seem very happily or surely designed. TWICKENHAM CINEMA, London. *Leathart and Granger, architects.*

V

FAÇADES

In England we feel that though a façade should always either please or impose, it need not necessarily be expected to do so by virtue of any particular appropriateness, or functional sincerity, to the type of building which lies behind it. That is to say, we are quite content if it wears a sufficiently well-bred and conscious air of its own importance as an example of street architecture or the focal point of a vista. This is largely owing to an idea which is still prevalent—as was made only too abundantly clear during the recent discussions of the House of Commons Committee sitting on the Charing Cross Bridge Bill—that architecture is something "applied to" the exterior of a building, like a coat of paint or a veneer. The interior, we have always understood, is a separate province, reserved for the professional activities of firms of decorators and furnishers.

The cinema is a building which needs to state its business very plainly, even forcibly, to the passer-by. Notwithstanding a widely held opinion to the contrary, this can be done more effectively without any accompanying blatancy. The cinema can only show its wares by artificial light. Even before it is dark it is constrained to turn day into night. Therefore a brilliant focus of artificial light should be the shop-sign, just as it is the operating medium, of a picture house. This being the case it is unimportant for its façade to be elaborately detailed. The less of carving and moulding the better. Such work will not merely be quite out of place, it will be entirely wasted. Thus the first sensible economy—and that a purely architectural one—is arrived at: an economy rendered possible, and even imperative, by the very latest thing in immaterial building materials, plain surfaces irradiated by light.

The cinema façade, like the cabinet of a wireless set or a gramophone, should be designed for "fitness for purpose," and nothing else. The nature of the building should inform its lineaments. To what extent it will prove what is rather fatuously called "artistic," or the reverse, depends largely, if not entirely, on the extent to which it is functionally efficient and appropriate and well proportioned. A plain, unsculptured and, as far as practical, unfenestrated front will not merely reproduce, and so suggest, the image of the film screen itself; it will, in like manner, act as a blackboard to publicity. Where intervening voids are unavoidable, they should be turned to account in the lighting scheme by way of contrast. Any sombre, unrelieved background will throw up whatever is outlined against it to the best advantage, provided that its surface is not disturbed by half-shadows of heavy cornices and fussy window surrounds.

In reality the cinema is very like a factory, for what is important about each goes on within and cannot be seen from without. A business-like manufacturing company will not fail to let the outside of its factory tell the world what is made inside. In the same way the exterior of a cinema ought to proclaim: (*a*) that it is such,

and (*b*) what films are being shown in the interior at the moment. Now the inscription on the factory that it boils, say, a particular brand of soap is unescapable, because the expanse of wall it is thrown up against has (or should have) no frills, no irrelevant architectural details, to seduce the gaze from this (anyhow for the company concerned) supremely important piece of publicity. A factory façade is so much blank wallage, which may, or may not, be fenestrated. The fewer the windows, the better the background for advertisement. The same consideration is equally applicable to the cinema façade. Heavily carved columns, architraves, consoles, swags, cornucopia and other conventional ornaments do nothing to help the passer-by to realise that the building in question is a cinema, which displays films for profit, and not a public library where periodicals and books can be seen for nothing. On the contrary, all this parade of architectural erudition only confuses him because these embellishments are common to almost every type of building. Promiscuous or slatternly bill-posting also tends to defeat its own ends by making the wall surfaces to which it adheres indistinguishable from any other stretches of advertisement hoarding. The secret of all open-air publicity is a single arresting image or announcement eclipsing everything else in its immediate vicinity. This simple lesson is only just being taken to heart by British cinema proprietors and cinema builders. An untidy and unkempt belt of garish posters—the design of cinema posters is, for some cryptic reason, the most degraded and old-fashioned of their kind in nearly every country—plastered along the front of a picture-house, or clumsily set out on makeshift sandwichmen's boards, will not " get " the public half so effectively as properly prepared wall spaces which frame handbills in isolating surrounds. The external lighting scheme ought to be as simple as it is bold. Emplacements for both day and night publicity must be designed as integral parts of the façade. Neither can be added as an afterthought with impunity.

A very fine example of unbroken blank wallage employed as a street façade is provided by Oskar Kaufmann's *Cines* picture house in Berlin (Fig. 67) Here we have a large, and entirely unfenestrated, expanse of masonry to which dignity and interest have been imparted by the proportions and incidental mouldings of the five piers by which it is divided. The sculptured figures on brackets under the eaves do nothing to enhance, and, if anything, detract from this effect. The base of each of the pilasters is used to accommodate a bill-posting board. These aptly balance the intermediate ventilation grilles, and with them constitute an integral part of the whole composition. The coved mansard roof of verdigrised copper sheeting has a particularly charming pitch, to which the surmounting coronal, fretted into the name of the cinema, forms a fitting finial. The severely simple façade of Herr Wilms's *Mercedes* in Neukölln (Fig. 68) has been entirely ruined by the dreadful lettering of the one-storied shops flanking it. These were an integral part of the original design, but once they were sub-let the architect ceased to have any control over the fascia, which are of the standard pre-war design still used by the firm of cheap multiple restaurants concerned. A most interesting elliptical façade would have been provided by the same architect's *Orpheum*, which was planned for the Wilmersdorf quarter of Berlin. Unfortunately, this cinema—like his *Palladium*, designed for a site in the north of the city—was never constructed.

Fig. 78 : A domestic note appropriate to a narrow façade terminating a side street. KAMMER LICHTSPIELE, Chemnitz. *Erich Basarke, architect.*

Fig. 79 : An interior that insists upon being sensational at all cost. Notice how the pipes of the organ are worked into the arch of the cave-like screen opening. TITANIA-PALAST, Steglitz-Berlin. *Schöffler, Schlönbach and Jacobi, architects.*

Figs. 80, 81 : Two ceiling lighting effects in the THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris. *Charles Siclis, architect.*

Figs. 82, 83 : Examples of new forms resulting from the use of reinforced concrete. (*Above*) BABYLON, Berlin, by *Hans Poelzig*. Notice the vertical lighting panels and the dual sweep of the staircase ; (*below*) THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris.

"Night architecture" has been very considerably developed in Germany for big shops, restaurants, cafés and, above all, cinemas. Some of the leading German architects—whose claims to fame rest on that masterly economy of material which obtains the greatest possible effect with a minimum of detail—consider that the cinema façade should be little more than an unobtrusive neutral background for Neon-lighting : a masonry echo of the linen screen. They argue that the cinema depends wholly, in a technical sense, on the contrast between darkness and light ; and that it has no concern with daylight effects. The cinema sleeps by day as other buildings do by night. Therefore its façade should ignore the claims of sunshine and be interpreted in terms of night, not day, architecture, because in darkness it can robe itself with a blaze of light, the hues of which are changeable at will.

The night façade of the *Titania-Palast* (Fig. 71) projects an interesting symmetrical pattern of horizontal lighting : alternate zebra-like striations of frosted brilliance and inky blackness. The spectacular turret beacon, which is similarly barred with bands of illumination, is a good example of architectural publicity. A criticism which can be made is that the name is about the least conspicuous part of the composition, the eye only reaching it after preliminary dazzling by the ensemble of the lighting. A space specially designed for billing the largest type of announcement posters, which is flood-lighted from the soffit of the narrow roof-ledge above, has been provided in the middle of a conspicuous side wall. It is interesting to compare the *Titania* with the *Capitol* in Breslau (Frontispiece)—"Capitol," in spite of its Fascist ring, seems to be easily the most popular name for cinemas in Germany—where composition relies on an even more direct and daring type of emphasis, based on the simplest possible use of verticality. Here a tall and narrow street elevation, faced in golden-brown ceramic, is divided into longitudinal strips of six sharply salient ridges which run to the very summit of the building. These are quite legitimately accentuated architecturally, because they encase the principal stanchions of the steel skeleton. At night they are arrestingly outlined in narrow pipings of Moore light, cleverly looped back, with a fine dramatic instinct, over the top of the attic story so as to terminate in silhouette against the open sky. Herr Friedrich Lipp completes this object lesson in the reduction of night architecture to its simplest terms by spacing out the name of the house between these luminous knife-edges, immediately above an ordinary rectangular Neon-lit frame containing the title of the film of the week and the cast appearing in it. A Neon alphabet is used for the purpose, the letters of which can be jointed together and connected up to the plugs in a few minutes. This is an infinitely more effective type of sky-sign inscription than the cumbersome old-fashioned way of spelling out with a multiplicity of separate globes. Herr Fritz Wilms's *Piccadilly* (Fig. 72) is a most carefully and charmingly composed façade, the decorative merits of which are by no means eclipsed by daylight. The lighting in this case—a single delicately diapered screen of fenestration, subdivided into a number of smaller units—is as economical as it is effective ; while the slightly fantastic denticulation of the roof parapet pulls the whole design into a thoroughly satisfactory unity. Its architectural distinction is in direct ratio to its publicity value. Note the neatly moulded panels for the handbills, with their recessed lighting, at the base of the side piers.

Enough has been said and enough views reproduced, it is hoped, to show that night architecture is something more than a transient phase or a mere stunt. It is a definite type of modern design with immense possibilities for beautifying our cities, which is opening up entirely new and untrammelled perspectives of architectural composition. Publicity lighting is becoming to architecture what captions and lay-outs are to journalism—a new and integral part of its technique, which can no longer be ignored or derided with superior academic " art for art's sake " smiles.

Figs. 84, 85 : A triumph of uncompromising simplicity. The auditorium of the BABYLON, Berlin. *Hans Poelzig, architect.*

Fig. 86 : An essentially " intimate " interior by Hans Poelzig. The sweep of the gallery is typical of this architect's mastery of the use of reinforced concrete. DELI, Breslau.

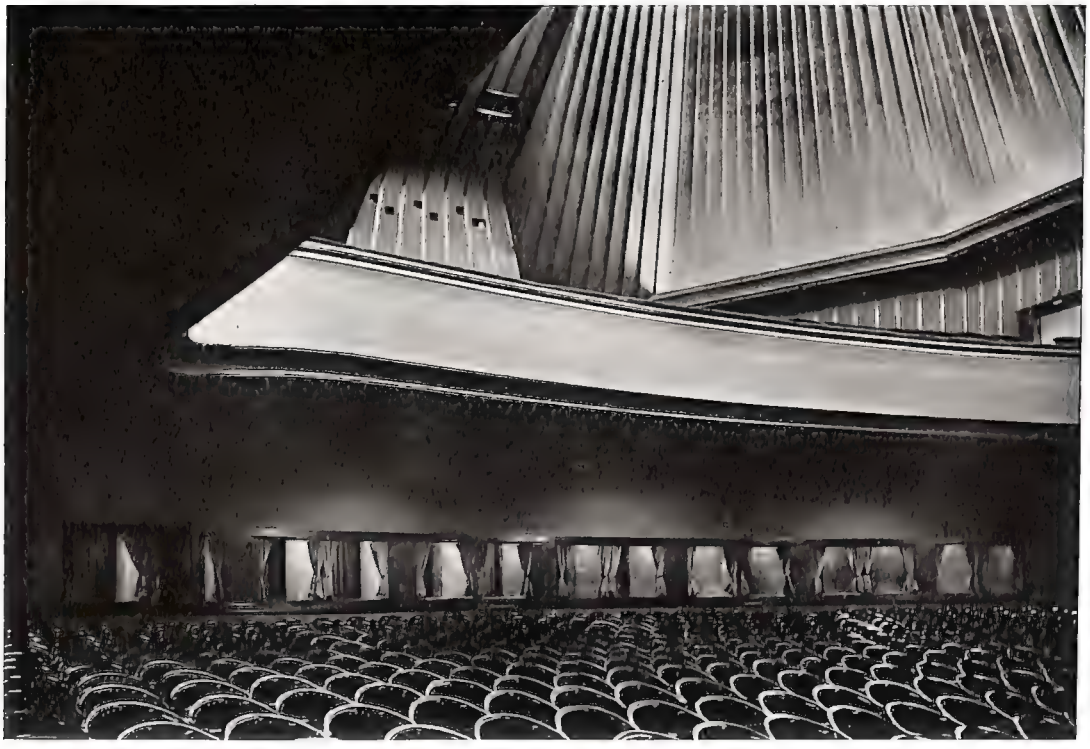


Fig. 87 : An interior of the CAPITOL, Berlin, showing part of the fluting of the octagonal dome. *Hans Poelzig, architect.*

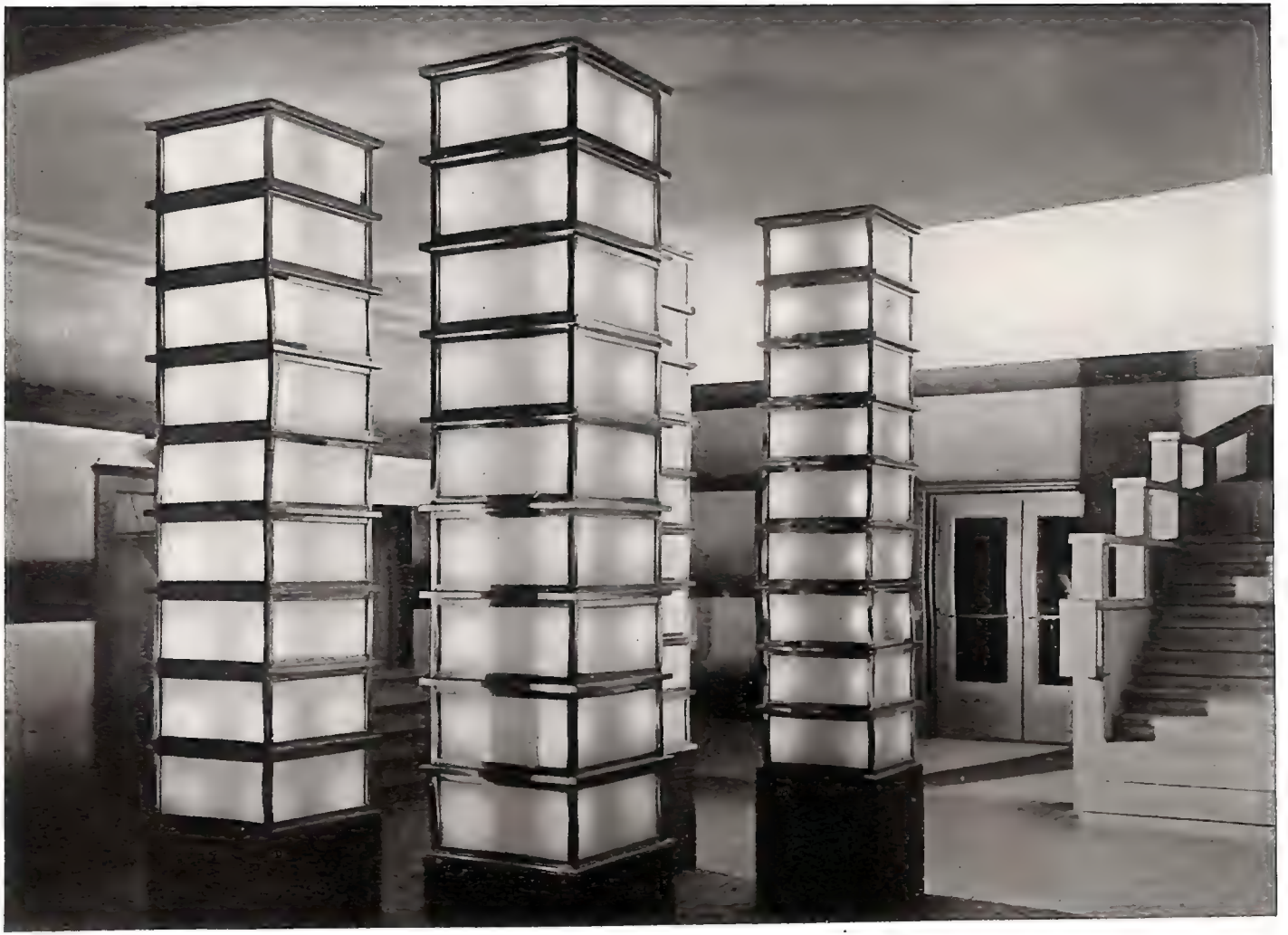


Fig. 88 : Light as decoration. The vestibule of the BIEBERBAU, Frankfort-on-Main. *E. J. Margold, architect.*

Fig. 89 : A promenade of engaging refinement. UFA-CINEMA, Turmstrasse, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.*

Figs. 90, 91 : Two solutions of the box-office problem. (*Left*) at the TITANIA-PALAST, Berlin ; (*right*) at the BIEBERBAU, Frankfort-on-Main.

Figs. 92, 93 : Two more entrance treatments. (*Above*) THÉÂTRE PIGALLE, Paris ; (*below*) BIEBERBAU, Frankfort-on-Main.

Figs. 94, 95 : Two curved promenade treatments by Oskar Kaufmann. (*Above*) the KROLL FESTSÄLE, Berlin ; (*below*) the KROLL OPER.

Figs. 96, 97 : Two foyer treatments, the one relying on bizarre overhead lighting, the other on ceramic revetment. (*Above*) ATRIUM, Berlin, by F. Lipp ; (*below*) the KAMMER LICHTSPIELE, Chemnitz. *E. Basarke, architect.*

VI

FOYERS AND AUDITORIUMS

THE entry into a cinema ought to prepare the spectator for the change from the outside world of everyday reality to the make-believe Hollywood world of the screen and screen conventions. Tactfully suggestive lighting is of paramount importance if the right note of expectancy is to be created or sustained. The lighting of the foyer has its own separate problems. We have already seen what importance the architect of the *Théâtre Pigalle* attaches to them (Fig. 13). Some German architects, who consider transition from the atmosphere of the street to that of the screen ought to be as abrupt as possible, in order that a violent, dramatic contrast may be produced, abbreviate their foyers into mere gangways. Others, preferring that such a change of environment should be not only more gradual and ceremonious, but accompanied by subtile decorative inflections, favour a capacious and softly lit lounge ; or a succession of anterooms and promenades with an imposing—even romantic—balcony staircase as the central feature. The former rely on a profusion of light to dazzle the spectator ; the latter use illumination sparingly, but cunningly, to charm and entice him.

As a rule the foyer illumination is of the type known as " cornice lighting," recessed behind horizontal mouldings or plaster bevels. To heighten the public's sense of anticipation, this suffused glow of indirect lighting is graduated, with variations of colour, from a subdued domestic note inside the main entrance to a blaze of brilliance before the principal doors giving access to the auditorium. In some cases, however, this order is deliberately reversed. One of the most interesting foyers illustrated is that of the *Bieberbau* in Frankfort-on-Main (Fig. 88). This cinema was converted from a mission hall, and financial considerations ruled out the possibility of structural alterations, and reduced the outlay on redecoration to the most disheartening minimum. Herr M. J. Margold has relied exclusively on bush-hammered concrete surfaces, chromium-steel banisters and fitments, and rectangular pylons of opalescent illumination. To these may be added an ability to design. The *Bieberbau* is an admirable object-lesson of how, given the chance, an architect who has his craft at his fingers' ends, and knows his job from A to Z, can always be relied upon to create something from nothing.

Chandeliers (the star-shaped design used by Herr Wilms in the promenade of the Turmstrasse *Ufa-Theater* affords particularly charming examples) and bracket sconces are intelligently, if sparingly, used in foyers and semicircular promenades. These are of neo-Baroque, Modernist or intermediate design. Here and there on the walls and over lintels vertical bars of frosted brilliance, framed in plain rectangular rims of brass or rustless steel, are often found. Fan-shaped shades of sand-blasted, acid-engraved or moulded glass, so popular in France, and already familiar over here, are seldom adopted. The entrance foyer of Poelzig's *Babylon* (Fig. 82), which

is situated in a poor working-class quarter of Berlin, relies exclusively on the uncompromising purity of unrelieved proportions without producing any tell-tale impression of cheap construction, skimped finish or shoddy fittings. It is a model of the most rigid economy, unencumbered spaciousness, and severely practical planning. Poelzig's staircases are excellent examples of the inexhaustible, and hitherto unsuspected, decorative potentialities of pure form which the logical use of concrete is continually revealing.

A prominent German architect recently enumerated to me the materials he had used for the interior of one of his most generally admired cinemas. They were, he said, " Metal plating, wood veneers, varnish, gilt, glass, paint, plaster and LIGHT." He added that the last of these was at once the cheapest and most effective, and at the same time the most difficult to use successfully. Too much light was as fatal to the ensemble of a well-balanced composition as was too little. Few of the materials ordinarily employed in interior decoration are neutral to light. They either deaden or absorb it ; or else reflect it in greater volume. Thus balance between reflecting and non-reflecting materials is as necessary in interior design as balance in the proportions of the elements grouped together to form its motifs.

The same meticulous care is applied to the scientific study of the decorative potentialities of light in Germany as is lavished in America and this country (*vide* such lamentable interiors as the Brixton " Astoria " and the Hammersmith " Commodore " and their prototype the " Roxy " in New York) on the outworn niceties of period reproduction, or the chocolate-box sentimentalities of " atmospherics." Indeed some of the smaller German *Kinos* might almost be described as decorated solely with the varied play of light reflected on to plain surfaces from different angles and in varying intensity. Poelzig has scored a notable triumph of this nature in his *Babylon*. Horizon lighting is now almost universal in Germany.

Every detail of a *Kino* has to be carefully plotted out and co-ordinated in advance. Instead of being tried out tentatively *in situ* during construction, as too often happens in this country, the complete lighting scheme, and all subsidiary effects dependent on it, is studied and experimented with in small scale models before the final choice is fixed. Indeed, there is no margin available for the rectification of errors, or sketchy uncertainties, of any kind in the original plan. Estimates are cut exceedingly fine, and every penny and every lighting point have to pull their weight and contribute their allotted quota to the " drawing " capacity of the house.

On the design of the lighting scheme, considered as an integral part of the decoration, depends how swiftly and effortlessly, when intervals in the programme intervene, the spectator's interest can be transferred from pre-occupation with the proscenium to appreciation of the auditorium as a whole. But it must not be allowed to distract his attention, or become a rival focus to the screen. Alternating patches of light and obscurity enhance the impression that the side walls converge on the screen like a funnel. A succession of receding luminous panels in the Rococo manner, which Lipp handles with great skill, produces fantastic patterns of overlapping reflections on dark polished wood surfaces. Where the wainscotting is of geometrical shapes of different kinds of sheet metal, a contrasting arrangement of dull and glinting plates will result in even more singular and amusing effects. A notable examplar of resourceful economy of design, which may be compared to

Figs. 98, 99 : Two more semicircular promenades. Notice the orderly competence of the cloak-room arrangements. (*Above*) CAPITOL, Dresden. *Martin Pietzsch, architect ;* (*below*) METROPOL, Berlin, reconstructed by Alfred Grenander, who has adroitly " edited " the exuberance of the nineteenth-century plaster ceiling.

Figs. 100, 101: Two typically modern entrance details. (*Above*) TITANIA-PALAST, Berlin ; (*below*) new SAVOY THEATRE, London.

Fig. 102 : A straightforward and not unpleasing British interior, viewed from the gallery. The NEW PALACE, Edinburgh. *Charles Mitchell, architect.*

Fig. 103 : A clever reconstruction of a museum gallery. The IMPERIAL INSTITUTE CINEMA, South Kensington, London. *Easton and Robertson, architects.*

Figs. 104, 105 : Two details of treatment. (*Left*) The gallery staircase of the CAPITOL, Berlin ; and (*right*) a view of the auditorium from the promenade, TITANIA-PALAST, Berlin.

Figs. 106, 107 : An interesting stepped-up American façade, showing "Spanish Mission" influences. The interior, frankly "period reproduction," is disappointing. LOBERO THEATRE, Santa Barbara, California. *G. W. Smith, architect.*

Figs. 108, 109 : (*Above*) Electric wiring is used as a decorative motif in the ROTE MÜHLE, Berlin, combined with a perfectly plain type of central lantern. *Fritz Wilms, architect.* (*Below*) A rather exotic Modernist screen surround in the GAMBETTA, Paris. *Henri Sauvage, architect.*

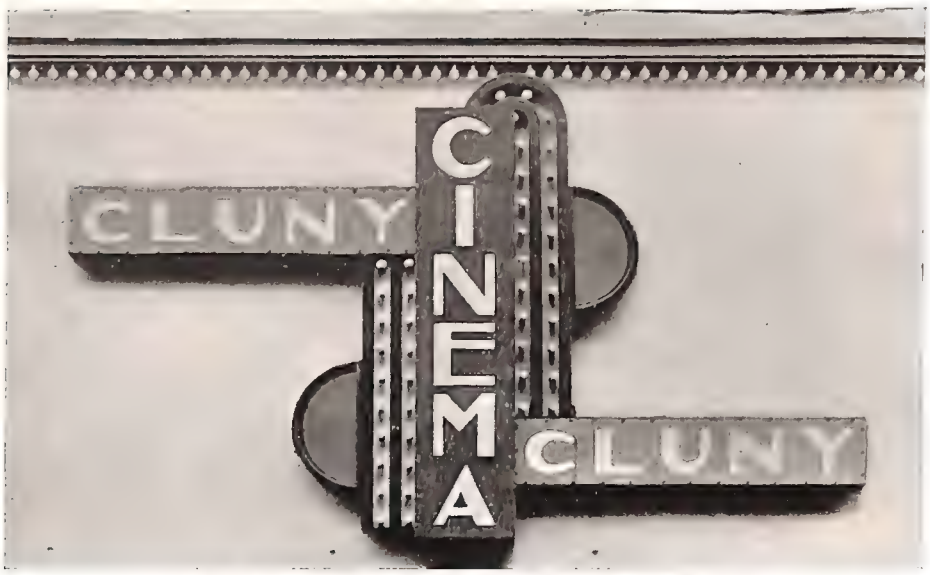
Figs. 110, 111, 112: Three details of interior treatment. (*Left*) The patterning of the reverbatory plates at the WELWYN THEATRE; (*centre*) Illuminated candelabra at the CAPITOL, Berlin; (*right*) One of the huge illuminated sustaining columns of the GROSSES SCHAUSPIELHAUS, Berlin.

the use of acoustic devices as ornamental features in the Welwyn Theatre (Fig. 110), is Herr Wilms's *Rote Mühle* (Fig. 108). Here one of the chief and, undeniably, most effective ornamental motifs is provided by the wiring itself. Four rows of triple strands of ordinary electric flex run horizontally along the side walls linking up the various lighting points and sconces. Besides forming an agreeable pattern, this device helps to break up the light refracted from the panelling of hammered strip metal into a restful chiaroscuro of shadows and highlights. The same architect's *Luna* in Berlin (Fig. 2) is a typical example of his use of plain matt and *lamé* metallic wall surfaces. At the *Mercedes* in the Utrechter Strasse there is an illuminated fountain on either side of the stage (*see* Fig. 60). Here, as in the other *Mercedes* and the Turmstrasse *Ufa-Theater* (Figs. 58 and 59), the arabesqued wrought-iron screens of the double-organ contribute to the indirect lighting. The type of organ employed is the " Oskalyd," which, besides music, emits all the sorts of noises incidental to film accompaniment, such as knockings at doors, ringings of bells, the rattling and whistling of trains and the rushing of water.

The roof is an element of almost paramount importance, and calls for most skilful and judicious lighting. The *Atrium* (Figs. 46, 47), where the colour scheme is a particularly subtle and delicate one, has an oval dome measuring 25 metres across, which conceals ninety floodlight projectors. Poelzig's Berlin *Capitol* is famous for the vast fluted vault of its octagonal cupola, the simple plastered corrugations of which converge towards the central " eye " lantern (Fig. 87). The full cupola, however, is rather a rare form, the roof being more often flat, or only partially coved. Many of the buildings illustrated, though relying primarily on indirect lighting, have interesting examples of enclosed circular or stellar-shaped chandeliers. This is a branch of design in which Wilms has been almost uniformly successful. In the *Titania-Palast* (Fig. 79), these chandeliers take the form of perfectly plain glass bosses of heroic proportions, which look like illustrations from Wells's " War of the Worlds." Considered as elements of design, however, they are simply awful warnings of the perils of " showing off " and letting technique run riot.

Marble is not much used for interior decoration, but facing with dark slabs of Travertine, or plain plates of copper, brass, pewter, aluminium and chromium steel, arranged in Cubist designs is, like panelling with veneers of curiously grained exotic woods, such as amboyna, very widely adopted. Ceramic, whether in plain colours or chamfered with bizarre figures and Modernist arabesques—of which the entrance foyer of the *Kammerlichtspiele* at Chemnitz (Fig. 97), is an example—is also popular. In the humbler *Kinos* paint is sometimes used to counterfeit all these different types of wainscotting.

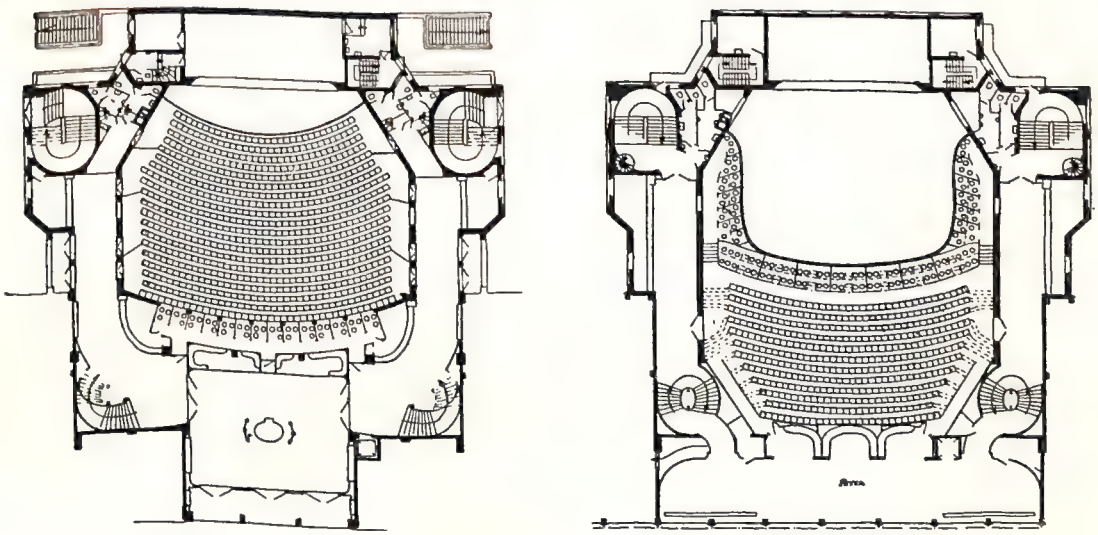
Figs. 113, 114: Decorative motives from the ROTE MÜHLE, Berlin. *Fritz Wilms, architect.* (*Left*) A Modernist wall bracket ; (*right*) A veneered panel of modern *chinoiserie.*



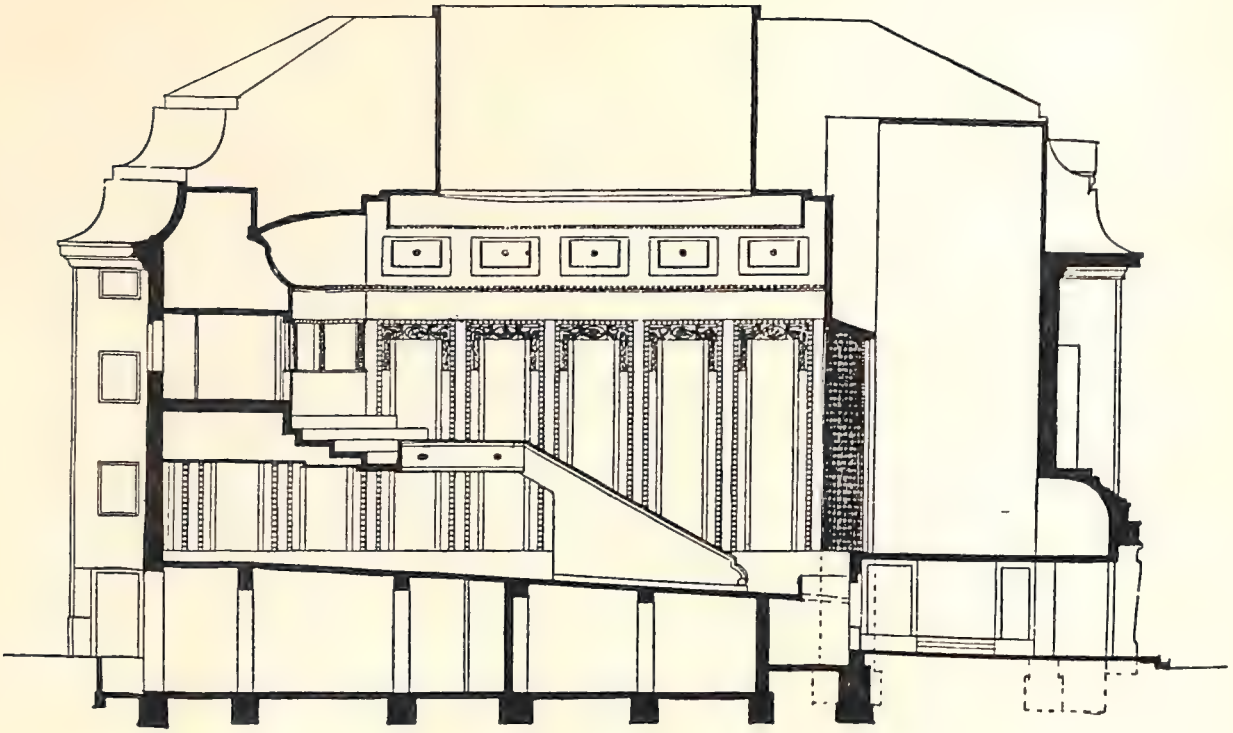
Figs. 115, 116: (*Above*) An effective electric sign from the CLUNY, Paris. *Raymond Fischer, architect*; (*below*) An amusingly *macabre* motif for concealing a recessed light in the DUCHESS THEATRE, London.

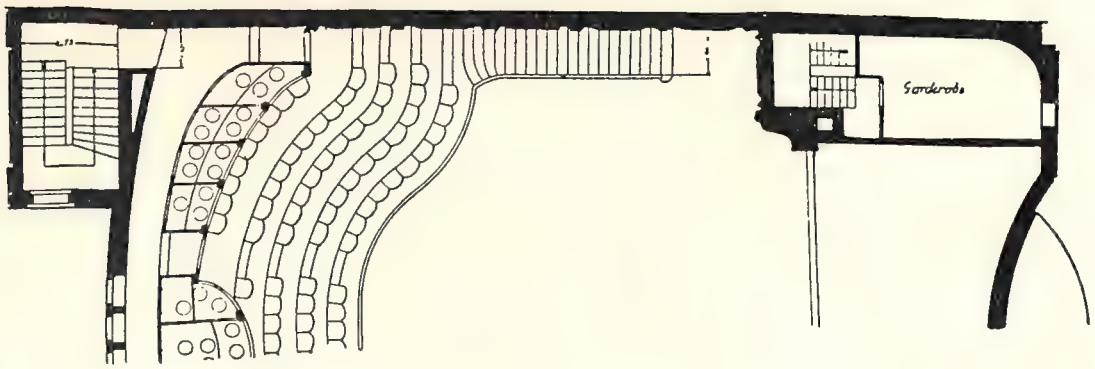
VII

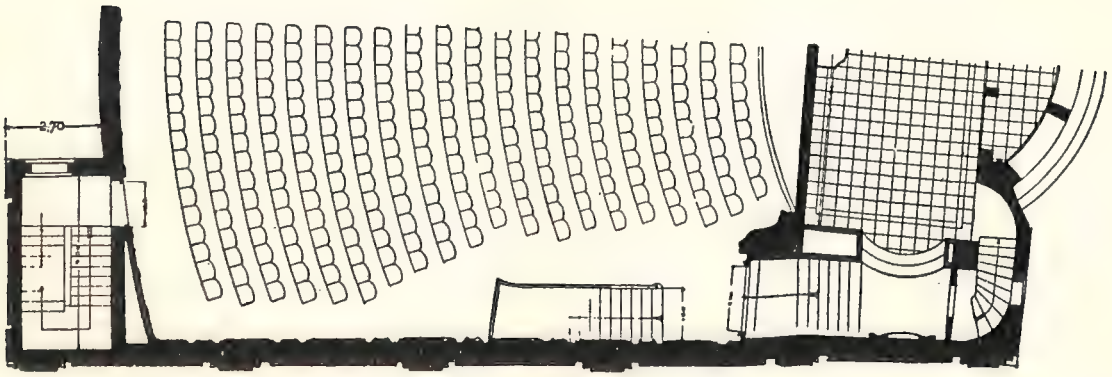
PLANS AND SECTIONS



Figs. 117, 118 : Ground floor and circle plans, CAPITOL, Berlin (*see Figs. 73 and 87*). *Hans Poelzig, architect.*







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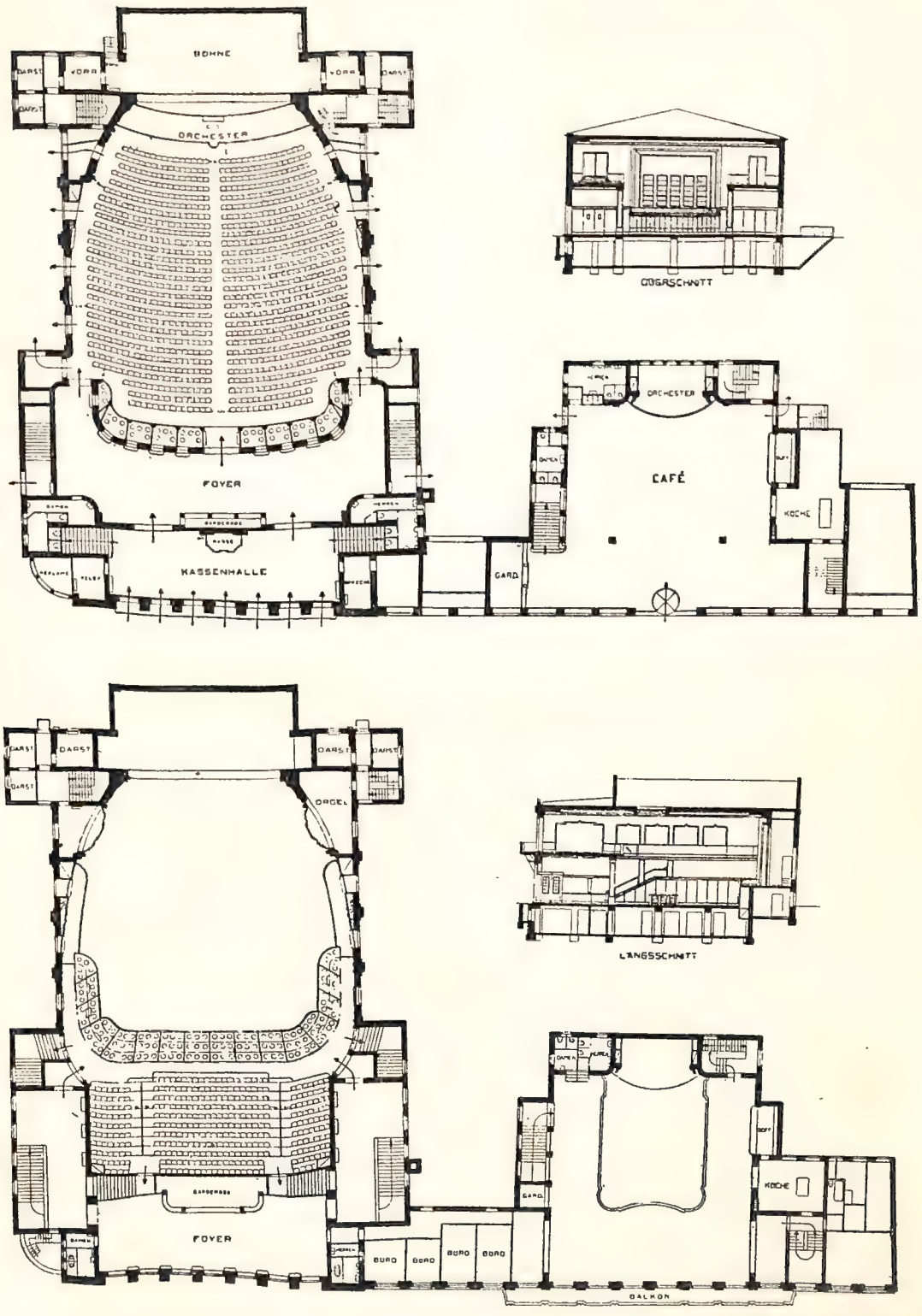

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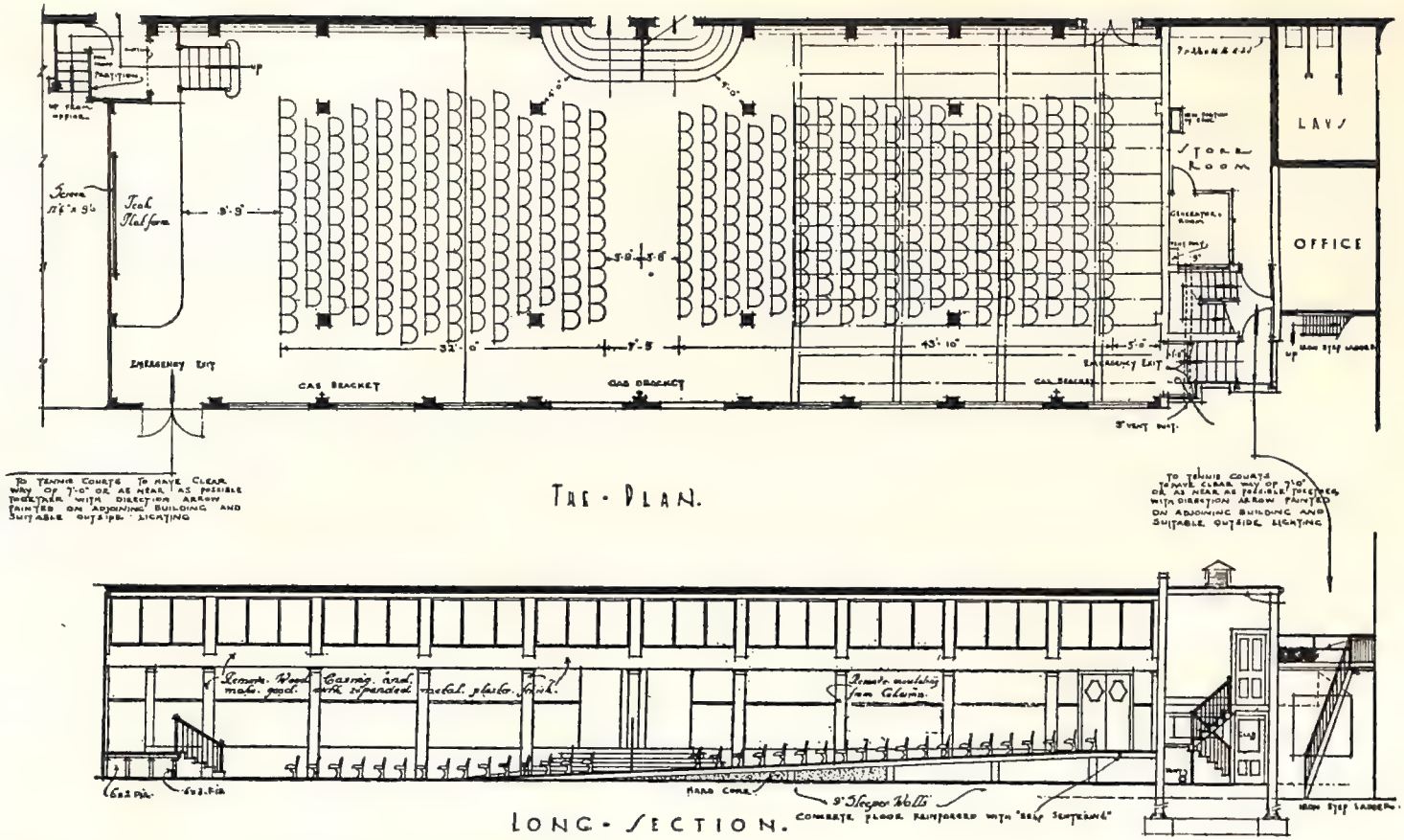

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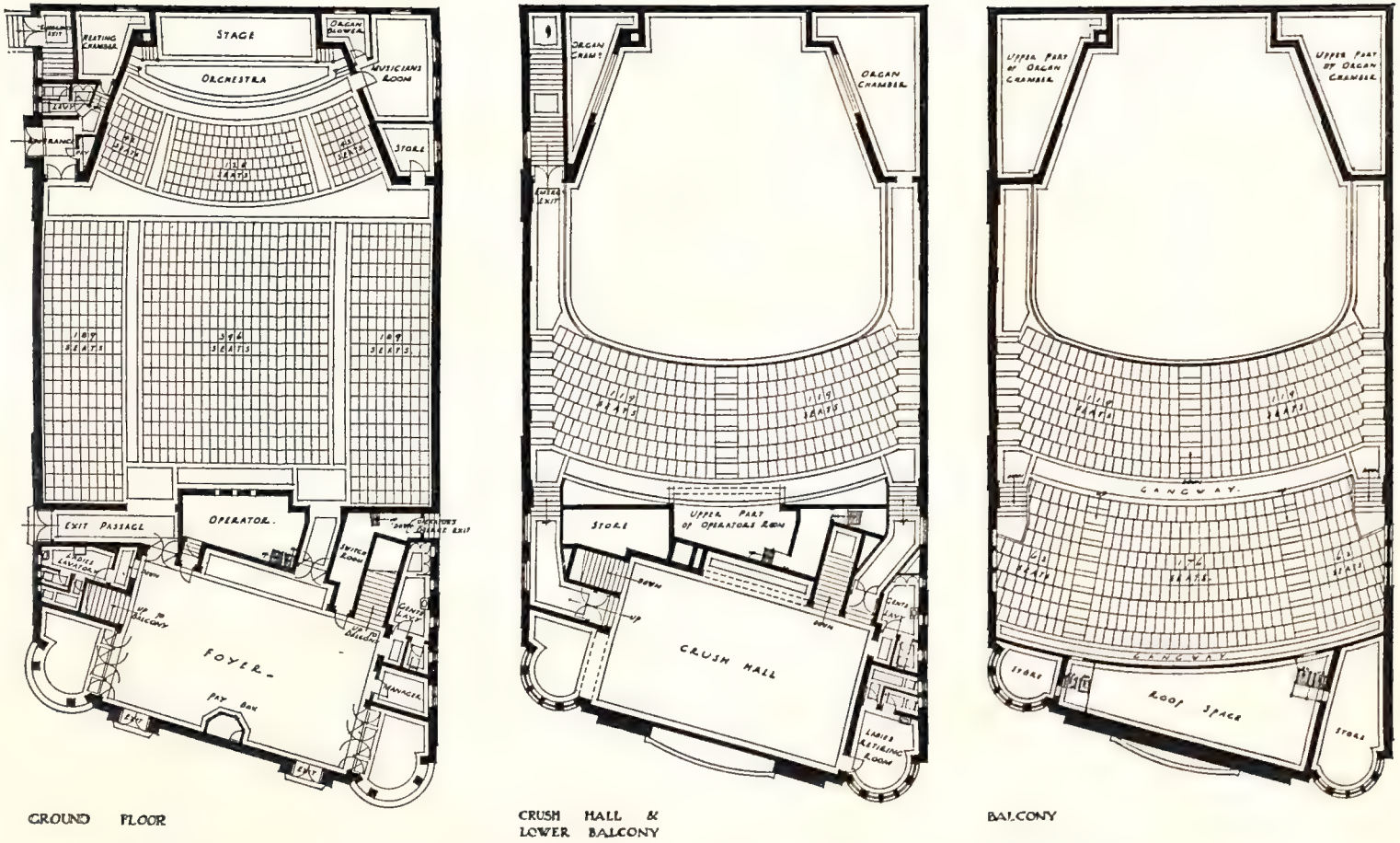

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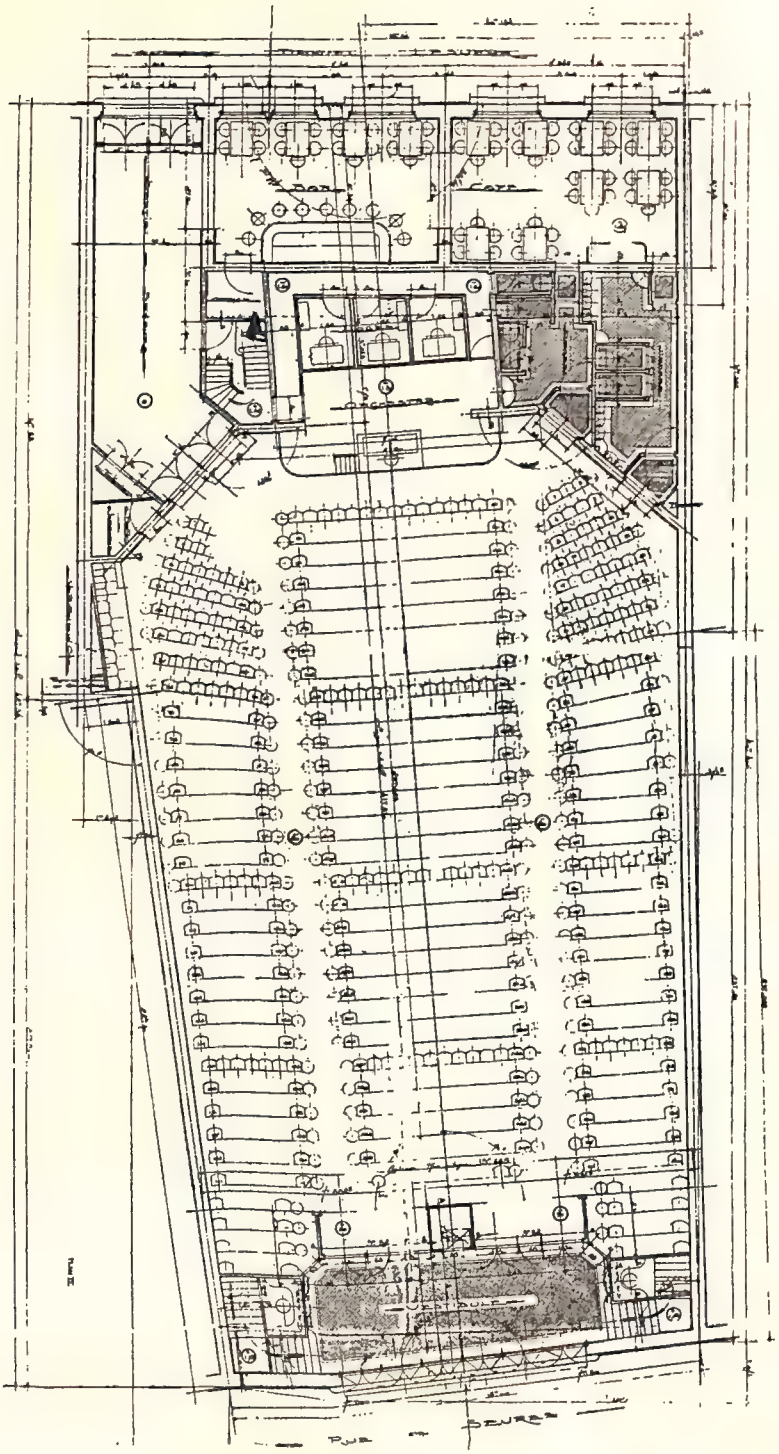

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